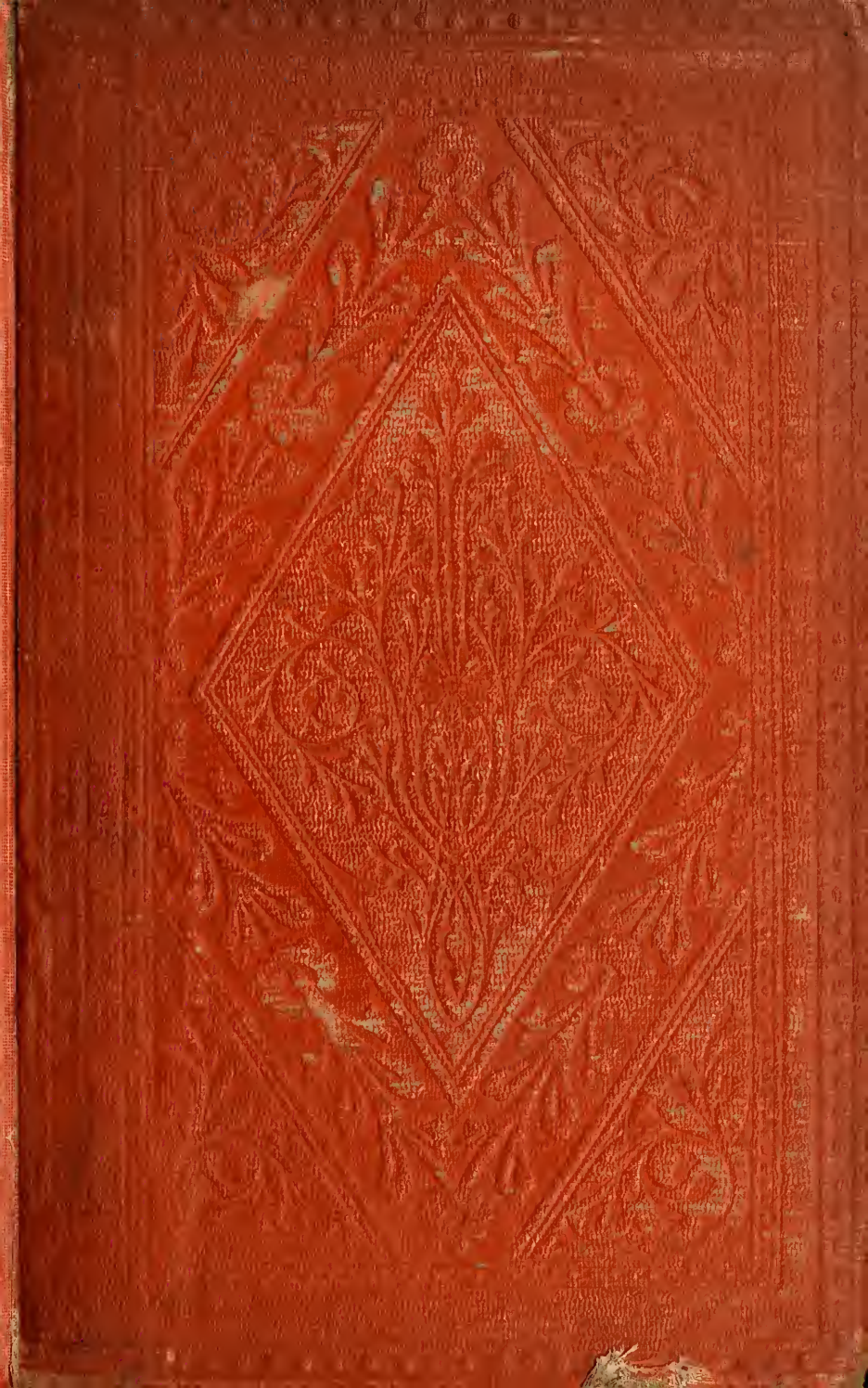




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Good Old Timestale

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Illustration. Good
The
GOOD OLD TIMES.

A Tale of Auvergne.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

Nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice.

SECOND EDITION.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

Where's Christophe ? 1

CHAPTER II.

The Flitting 16

CHAPTER III.

Le Puy 30

CHAPTER IV.

The Black Lady 45

CHAPTER V.

Roast Chestnuts 56

CHAPTER VI.

PAGE

Where the Shoe pinches 71

CHAPTER VII.

Lost, Stolen, or Strayed 82

CHAPTER VIII.

The Mysterious Stranger 99

CHAPTER IX.

The Tire-Lire 111

CHAPTER X.

Brother and Sister 126

CHAPTER XI.

News from Paris 139

CHAPTER XII.

The Incognita discovered 153

CHAPTER XIII.

Halting between two Opinions. 172

Contents.

v

CHAPTER XIV.

	PAGE
<i>Intercession</i>	186

CHAPTER XV.

<i>Mystery</i>	199
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVI.

<i>A Festival</i>	210
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVII.

<i>A Wedding</i>	223
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

<i>The Routiers</i>	234
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIX.

<i>The Attack</i>	258
-----------------------------	-----



THE
GOOD OLD TIMES.

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CHAPTER I.

Where's Christophe ?

AT the door of a cottage, in one of those wide valleys girdled by craggy mountains which one sees in Auvergne, stood a healthy, black-eyed girl in a snow-white cap, blue petticoat, and geranium-coloured apron, looking eagerly forth, and shading her eyes with her hand from the mid-day sun. It was the latter end of autumn ; the harvest and vintage were over, and the birches, larches, and aspens which sprang up in the fissures of the distant mountains, were clad in every variety of colour, while the rocks themselves emulated their dyes in never-ending gradations of purple, lilac,

dark green, umber, tawny, grey, and pale brown, till they joined the well-watered meadows at their feet. In the midst of the valley, at the distance of several miles from the cottage, suddenly rose a gigantic, precipitous mount, crowned with a feudal castle, and supporting on its sides an irregular, closely-built town, including sundry churches and a cathedral. A little apart from this huge pile, but closely adjoining it, shot up a sugar-loaf rock, shivered into peaks sharp as needles, and apparently too perpendicular and precipitous to be accessible to the foot of man, yet crested at its summit by a church-spire.

These rocks now lay bathed in a golden haze ; but though they would have riveted the regards of a stranger, the girl was too familiar with them to bestow on them any attention, and was absorbed in looking down a rough track, hardly deserving the name of a road, which traversed the valley and passed the cottage-door.

Some one was slowly advancing along it, who, as he drew nearer, caused her to mutter rather impatiently,—“ ’Tis not he.”

When the pedestrian approached, he proved to be a middle-aged man of pleasant, acute, and

thoughtful aspect, clad in a homespun suit, with a leathern girdle, and bearing a small wallet.

“ I wish you a good day,” said he cheerfully, speaking the *patois* of the district with a somewhat foreign accent ; “ I wonder if you can give me a draught of milk.”

“ I both can and will,” said the girl, “ though it is our last ; our cow went to market this morning.”

“ That sounds bad,” said the wayfarer.

“ It is not bad, however,” said the girl, “ for we are going away ourselves. Everything is packed up and ready for starting ; had you come an hour later, you would have found the house empty and the door locked.”

“ Why so ? ”

“ Why so ? why, because winter is coming on, and the valley will be buried in snow, and we shall have no means of subsistence, nor be able to defend ourselves against the wolves.”

“ Whither are you flitting ? ”

“ Where but to Le Puy ? There’s plenty of work there, both for my brother and me. He will engage himself to some currier, canvas-maker, or armourer, in order to be near me ; and

I shall sleep at my grandmother's, and join myself to a company of the women of the plain in the like case with myself. We shall hire a lodging, adopt a rule, choose a head, place ourselves under the protection of some saint, and employ ourselves in lace-making. We shall talk, say our prayers, sing hymns and ballads, tell tales, and work all the more merrily for working in concert, I assure you. But come in, come in! My brother drove the live stock off before day-dawn, and I am now awaiting his return."

Saying this, she turned in-doors, and welcomed the stranger into the principal room of the cottage, which, indeed, with the exception of one or two lean-tos, occupied the whole ground-floor. It was roomy enough, but dark, having little light but what entered through the door, and down the huge, funnel-shaped chimney. The walls, of dark, rough wood, were black with smoke, the roof raftered and supported by a clumsy wooden pillar in the midst of the kitchen; the floor was roughly paved; and a heavy, open staircase of some ten or twelve steps led to a loft above, which supplied all the sleeping accommodation of the cottage. It was bare and disfurnished;

everything, except a cumbrous settle and table and a few household implements, being removed, packed up, or stowed away. On the table, however, were the materials for their last noontide meal, consisting of black bread, a fragment of crumbling, poor-looking cheese, a salad, a jug of milk, and a bottle of thin wine.

“ Sit down, sit down,” said the girl, patting the settle, which was too heavy for her to move, “ and let me relieve you of your wallet, and dust your shoes ; you look weary.”

“ Indeed I am,” replied he, smiling and accepting her good offices, “ so that your hospitality is all the more acceptable.”

“ I blush to hear you call it such,” replied she, “ for really I have nothing to offer you worth having. But I can only give what I have.”

“ Even a cup of cold water offered to a fellow-Christian in the name of our Master shall have its reward,” said the traveller.

“ Well, here is milk, at any rate ; or will you have wine ? ”

“ Why not wait for your brother ? ”

“ But he is behind time, and you are tired and hungry.”

“Nay, I can readily wait. This kitchen is so cool and shady that half my fatigue is gone already.”

“Have a draught of milk, at any rate. Are you going to Le Puy?”

“Yes; it looks but a step.”

“It is farther, however, than it seems. The size of the rock Corneille, on which it stands, and the clear air of a day like this, deceive one; besides which, you can’t reach it as a crow flies. There is a river to cross, and a marsh to go round by a circuitous path, unless you are light-footed and acquainted with its stepping-stones; there is also a rugged descent to the broken bridge in the thicket. But, if you will join our party, we will show you the nearest way. Are you a pedlar?”

“Why—yes.”

“You have a very small pack.”

“It only contains a few hymn books and broad-sheets. Perhaps you will buy one?”

“Ah, I have no money to spare.”

“Accept one, then, in return for your milk. You can read, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes, Christophe taught me.”

“Here comes your brother; I see his shadow across the door.”

“Ah, it is only my youngest brother, poor Michel.”

At the same instant, a heavy-looking lad, disfigured by a goître, and with a half-imbecile look, staggered into the cottage. He stood stupidly staring for a minute or two at the stranger, and then approaching his sister, said something inarticulate, in a plaintive tone, which only her practised ear could render into “Where’s Christophe?”

“Christophe will soon be here,” said she, cheerily. “You want your dinner, Michel, and that is why the time seems long. Eat this;” and she gave him a piece of bread. He sank down on the ground at her feet, with his shoulders resting against her knees; and when he had eaten the bread, she gave him a cup of milk. After this, he dropped his head back on her lap, and instantly fell asleep.

“Poor fellow,” said she, fondly stroking his hair, and stooping down to kiss his forehead; “he has been basking in the hot sun, watching for Christophe, till the heat has made him drowsy. It is as well he should have a nap before we start. Won’t you help yourself to some bread and cheese? You see I am fixed.”

“ No, I’ll wait for Christophe,” said her guest ;
“ I shall see him before you will, where I am sitting ; and when we are tired of chatting, I will read to you awhile, and that will make the time seem short.”

“ He certainly ought to be near home by this time. I can’t think what keeps him.”

“ Whose castle is that I see perched on a crag a great way off ? ”

“ The Baron de St. Vidal’s. He’s a terrible Turk ; and yet people say there’s some good in him. I don’t know what it consists in. He is one of the three saints ; so they call him and the Barons of St. Hérem and St. Chaumont ; but, for my part, I think they might better be called the three sinners. They have no fellow-feeling for poor people, and, instead of protecting, they oppress us.”

“ The universal story, my good girl.”

“ Ought it, need it, to be so ? ”

“ Certainly not.”

“ Why, now, the year of the bad harvest—Do you see Christophe coming ? ”

“ No, the road is quite clear. What were you going to say ? ”

“The year when the harvest and vintage so miserably failed, the rich ought to have come forward and helped us poor people ; but instead of that, they took from us what little we had.”

“The monks ought to have helped you.”

“The monks! Why, the monks of Chanteuges used to sally forth at night and rob on the highway!”

“Humph!”

“I shall never forget that year—it was the year my mother died. I used to sit beside her bed, making lace at every spare moment ; and then came the law that only the nobles were to wear lace, which cut off one great branch of our trade, that among the rich citizens. The men of Le Velay scattered far and wide, that winter, in search of work, locking up their houses, and sending their wives and children into the fortified towns ; but my mother was too ill to be moved, and my father and Christophe would not leave her. It was well they did not, or we should have been devoured by the wolves that came up to our very door. As it was, we should have perished of hunger, but for the goodness of our neighbours, every one of whom, before dispersing, brought us

something to add to our little stores. You see him ? ”

“ No, I only saw a young wolf steal across the road. Go on.”

“ I forget what I was saying.”

“ About the hard winter. That was in the year 1547, I’m thinking.”

“ Yes, two years ago. I was then a girl of sixteen.”

“ No more ? I should have thought you older ! ”

“ Care makes people look old,” said she, with a sad smile.

“ It does,” said he reflectively. “ I dare say, now, you reckon *me* at fifty ? ”

“ Well,—perhaps forty-eight.”

“ I’m barely forty, though.”

“ What is your name ? ”

“ My baptismal name—the name I am chiefly called by—is Bertrand.”

“ You are not a Velaysan ? ”

“ Oh, no ! ”

“ Where *can* Christophe be ? I grow fidgety about him.”

“ Nay, no harm can befall him in broad daylight.”

“ You don’t know,” replied she absently ;
“ there are shadows beginning to fall towards the east.”

“ Very short ones, though.”

“ But they will lengthen every minute, and we shall start so late.”

“ Come, tell me some more about the hard winter.”

“ Ah ! I don’t like to think of the hard winter. My poor, poor mother died, commending me to my father’s and brother’s care, and poor Michel to mine. The ground was so hard, we could not have her grave dug till the frost broke up. When the frost broke up, the people of the three valleys returned to their homes, but not to be happy and thriving as before. The men who had been employed in populous cities, had heard strange, new doctrines preached, and came back to infect their families with them.”

“ What kind of new doctrines ? ”

“ Why, that there should be only two sacraments instead of seven, and that the eucharist should be administered in both kinds to the laity ; and that the Blessed Virgin and the saints were to be revered but not worshipped, and

that we only need confess our sins to God the Father."

"You have got the new doctrines very pat!"

"I heard my father discuss them so often with our neighbour Grégoire!"

"Which side did your father take?"

"The old side—when he took any at all. But he mostly heard what Grégoire had to say, and questioned him, without saying much in answer—at least before *us*; for once or twice I overheard him mutter 'not before the children.'"

"Was your mother absolved before she died?"

"No, we were snowed up; no priest could be fetched; which made it the more shocking. It made me hope and almost think there *must* be *some* truth in the new doctrines, for I cannot but trust she went to heaven, and the new doctrines teach that there is no purgatory."

"The question is, *are* they new doctrines?"

"Why, who heard of them till lately? My grandfather and grandmother knew nothing of them; nor my father and mother till just before they died."

"Your father is dead, then?"

"Ah, yes; he had gone to the funeral of a

friend, a few miles off, and, returning home in the dark by a short cut, he fell over a cliff and was dashed to pieces. But I really *must* look after Christophe."

And she endeavoured gently to remove Michel's head from her lap to the settle ; but he moaned and resisted the exchange so unmistakeably that, sorrowfully smiling, she remained where she was.

"Your looking forth will not bring him in sight any sooner," said Bertrand, "and you know I command the road. Come, I promised you I would beguile the time by reading to you a little. Suppose I unpack my books ; perhaps, by means of one of them I shall be able to show you that the doctrines you call new are not really so, but as ancient as our religion itself."

"Read what you will, so that you do not unsettle me," said the girl. "I know as well as you do that the priests call your books dangerous, but they themselves so neglect us, and so set their own doctrines at nought by their practice, that I feel less and less respect for them every day, and often think over what Grégoire used to say to my father. It is not altogether wise, perhaps, to enter on such matters with one of

whom I know nothing, but somehow your manner reassures me, and I cannot but think you are honest."

"Many thanks to you for trusting me so far," said Bertrand, smiling, as he unfastened his little wallet. "Crafty and scholarly men may throw dust in our eyes, and make the worse side appear the better, as many of them have done too long; but the beauty of these doctrines, which you call new, is, that they don't depend on man's craft or scholarship *at all*, but are set down in the book of God himself, with such plainness that they who run may read."

"Ah, but how few have that book to refer to!" said the girl.

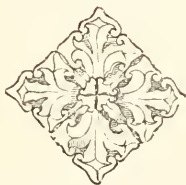
"All might and ought to have it," said Bertrand, "and I trust the day will come when all *will*."

In a few minutes she was listening to his reading and expositions with deep attention. At first, indeed, her eye often restlessly wandered to the shadows before the door, and her thoughts strayed to her absent brother; but gradually her mind became fixed on the subjects that Bertrand with great earnestness and simplicity was bringing

before it ; and she was absorbed in topics absolutely removed from her own private griefs, when suddenly a young man of rustic appearance, overheated and in great agitation, burst into the kitchen.

“ Christophe ! ”

“ Oh, Colette ! ”





CHAPTER II.

The Flitting.

IT was now nearly three o'clock.

“What has happened? What kept you at Le Puy?” cried Colette, with a look of great alarm.

“I’ve never reached Le Puy! I’ve never got beyond the broken bridge—who’s that?” stopping short, and looking suspiciously at Bertrand.

“A good honest man—a pedlar, going to Le Puy. No fear, Christophe. But, where then are the cow, and the sheep, and the goats?”

“I know no more than you do. We were picking our way down to the bridge—I and the stock—and I had just got them nicely in single file, when, ‘Hem!’ cries some one; and, before I could look round, I was pinioned, blindfolded, and tied to a tree. I gave one of the fellows a precious black eye, first, though; that’s one comfort. He roared out, but the rest laughed and giped; I should think there must have been

half a dozen of them by their voices, which gradually died away as they drove off the stock. So, there was I, lashed to the tree, unable to stir hand or foot, or see where I was, or keep the flies off my face, for hour after hour ; till, at length, hearing some one whistling, I bawled out, ‘ Help ! help ! ’ without knowing if it were to friend or foe. As luck would have it, it was young Meurice, who was surprised enough to see me pinned up like a kite against a barn-door. Heugh ! my joints ache from head to foot ; and only look at my nose ! And all the stock gone ! ”

“ The monks of Chanteuges ! ” said Bertrand.

“ Nay, *they* only rob at night,” said Christophe, “ and I think these were likelier to be some of the Terrible Baron’s men.”

“ De St. Vidal ? ”

“ Des Adrets. No, no, St. Vidal doesn’t stoop to these mean things. Any way, our stock’s gone, and we’re pretty near ruined.”

And the poor young fellow wiped his brow and sat down. Colette put her arm round his neck, and kissed him ; and Michel, without being able to comprehend the matter very clearly, saw that

Christophe was in trouble, and clasped one of his hands.

Bertrand, looking down on his book, read aloud: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

"Good words, master," said Christophe sadly.

"This seems an affliction, rather than a temptation," said Colette.

"And therefore the better to be borne," said Bertrand. "Temptations, we know, come from the Evil One, whereas afflictions are laid on us by God."

"Yes, such as a broken leg, or a bad illness," said Christophe, "but this was the wicked deed of wicked men, not a dispensation of Providence."

"God overrules all second causes," said the pedlar. "He might have smitten the men or diverted them from their purpose, if He had seen it would have been for the best."

"You talk like a priest, master,—or, rather, as a priest *ought* to talk. But what's to be done?"

“It is too late now to start for Le Puy,” said Colette. “Besides, I should be afraid.”

“If you would have done as I wanted,” said Christophe, not crossly, but smiling at her, though a little ruefully, “we should have waited till to-morrow, and joined Grégoire’s family, and then this would not have happened.”

“Ah!” said she, dropping her eyes, “you know why I did not like that.”

“Why, Fabien would not have bitten your nose off, would he?” lowering his voice and smiling.

“At any rate we should have saved our stock. I’m sorry!”

“Never mind, it will do no good. We will still join them to-morrow.”

“Yes, that will be safest. I’ll unpack the bedding again. But we had better dine first—how hungry you must be.”

“As a monk!”

“Poor Christophe! and I fancied you being made much of by granny and aunt Marcelline, and having the best of the *bouilli*, and roast meat, and sweet things besides!”

“No sweet things to my share to-day! Never

mind ! It will be all the same a hundred years hence. Let us begin."

And again he cast an inquiring look at Bertrand.

" I was on my way to Le Puy," said Bertrand, " and, being weary and thirsty, asked your sister for a draught of milk. She, like a good Christian as she is, made me come in to rest myself, and partake of your meal ; and, as I found her very anxious about you, I tried to beguile the time by reading to her."

" Very kind of you, master. Let me help you to some of our poor fare."

Bertrand reverently bent his head over his folded hands, and said a short grace.

" That ought to have come from me," said Christophe, " unless, indeed, you really are a churchman of some sort, as your speech would make one think. However, this hardly seemed like a regular meal, and I said grace before breakfast, though I little knew what I was going to receive, or what I was asking the Lord to make me thankful for."

" Lucky for ourselves that we know not what a day will bring forth," said Bertrand, " but we can

never do amiss in asking the Lord's blessing on it, whatever it may prove."

"Come, Colette, come and eat too, unless you have dined already."

"I have many things to do, if you will excuse me," said she, in a broken voice, "and I'm not hungry."

"Many things?" repeated Christophe, and catching hold of her reluctant hand. Drawing her towards him, he saw she was crying.

"Pshaw! leave the 'many things,' and come to dinner, like a good girl," said he; "don't be like—like—"

"Martha," suggested Bertrand. "Have faith that all will be well yet, and leave to-morrow to take care of itself. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

"Yes,—only—"

"No onlys," said Christophe. "Come, and sit down here. What! you won't eat?"

"But, Christophe, we shall have nothing for supper."

"Fie on it!—I will run down to Grégoire's presently, and beg for a little bread and cheese."

“ Yes, perhaps that will be the best way—the only way, in fact ;—and some milk for Michel. I would rather not have done it, though.”

“ Why, would not *you* do as much for *them* ?”

“ Oh yes ! only—”

“ Only you don’t like putting yourself under an obligation to them.—Nonsense !”

“ Well, then, if you *do* go, you will say that we shall join them to-morrow ? ”

“ Yes, yes.”

After their meal, Christophe set forth to his neighbour’s cottage, having previously joined his sister in cordially desiring Bertrand to accept their poor hospitality till the morrow. When he was gone, Colette busied herself in unpacking some of her bundles, and making up beds for the night ; while Michel, unable to understand why it was, stood wistfully watching her. Bertrand read his books, or sat gazing over the valley ; now and then talking to Colette, when she had leisure to attend to him.

Christophe returned a little before dusk, a good deal improved in spirits by dilating on his misadventure to pitying listeners. Early as the sun set, it was the signal for all the little family to

retire to rest, after Bertrand had offered up a short prayer for protection and blessing.

The next morning the inharmonious winding of a cow-horn before their door called them forth ready to start with their neighbours. It was quite a patriarchal flitting ; for Grégoire, though a very small farmer, was rich compared with Christophe, and had a miscellaneous collection of cows, goats, pigs, sheep, and one or two rough ponies, which his sons were driving before them, while his old cart-horse carried not only his pretty daughter Gabrielle and sundry bundles of bedding, but two or three hen-coops full of poultry.

Christophe led out his only horse and cart, which Bertrand had already helped him to load, and placed his sister and brother in front of the luggage. He had likewise a small truck to push ; and Bertrand insisted on carrying the poultry-coop, which, however, they soon found they might just as well tie under the cart. The cottage-door was locked ; Colette gave one wistful, parting look at their home, and then turned her head away with a half sigh. Fabien, the son of Grégoire, soon left his cattle in charge of a lad of

fourteen, and dropped back to speak to her. He was rather a heavy-built young man, with massive but not pleasant features, and a searching, restless expression about the eyes.

"The evening before last, you said you would not join us," said he.

"I can't hear one word you say," said Colette, smiling, and looking down upon him with an air provokingly deaf.

"I don't believe it, though," muttered he to himself. "What white teeth she has, the wretch! and her lips are as red as cherries. I say, Colette!" raising his voice, "you have a good deal of jolting there—it would tire you far less to come down and walk."

"Who would drive the cart, Fabien?"

"Why, Michel."

"Poor Michel! I might as well throw the reins on the horse's neck at once."

"If you did that, no harm would come of it. Your blind old horse would go safe enough."

"Do not deride my blind old horse; he has been a faithful servant many a year."

"Well, but, Colette, I would lead him."

"And leave your own cows and sheep?"

“ André can mind them ; he’s doing so already.”

“ Yes ; and there goes the old ewe tumbling down the bank.”

Fabien, with a muttered expression of impatience, ran to rescue the old ewe ; and when he had done so, thought it as well to mind his own affairs for a while, to escape a rebuke from his father.

“ So this is the way you farm in Le Velay,” said Bertrand to Grégoire. “ You sell off your stock at the beginning of winter, to buy it again in the spring ! ”

“ What can we do ? ” said Grégoire. “ At all events, we save it from the terrible Baron and his *routiers*.¹ They can’t run away with our corn-fields and vineyards ; and our cottages are not worth their ransacking, though they do burn them sometimes.”

Bertrand was silent for a minute or two, and then, in a deep, solemn undertone, murmured, “ Go to, now, ye rich men ! weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you ! Behold,

¹ Road-bands ; robbers.

the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, *crieth!* and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth and been wanton ; ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter.”

“ Capital ! ” exclaimed Christophe, who was within ear-shot ; “ I like a man that talks so, whoever he may be.”

“ That’s the word of God, I fancy ? ” said Grégoire to Bertrand in a low voice, eyeing him attentively as he spoke.

“ You are right.”

“ Give us some more of it. It is like rain to thirsty land.”

“ Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you.” Then, suddenly changing the inflection of his voice, which sank into his hearers’ hearts, Bertrand went on, “ Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient ; establish

your hearts ; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

" Beautiful ! " ejaculated Grégoire.

" And so true ! " added Christophe. " About the husbandman, I mean."

" The question is, *does* the coming of the Lord draw nigh ? " said Grégoire sadly. " I wish it did, for my part. But, you see, the writer of that saying thought it was near at hand, and many a long century has rolled over the world since, and mankind only get worse and worse."

" Say not so, my friend."

" Well, I actually think it. The rich *cannot* well be more depraved and lawless than they are now. And many of the poor are depraved, too."

At this point, the narrow road became strewn with masses of rock, and plunged down a precipitous bank ploughed by winter torrents, to a brawling, turbulent tributary of the Loire, shaded by tangled thickets on either side that nearly closed across it, and spanned by a rough stone bridge of one arch with a broken parapet.

" Here's the place where I was waylaid ! " said Christophe ; and the little caravan halted and

looked around, with an eye to present as well as past danger.

“As well chosen a spot for a *sortie* as could easily be found,” observed Bertrand.

“Halt!” cried Grégoire, as the little party began to move on. “Take the cattle across first, Fabien, and then come back to lead your sister’s horse. Two men to each horse’s head will not be too many, and we had better get them across one at a time.”

Fabien cast an alarmed look into the thicket, and then obeyed orders. The passage was slow and dangerous, but effected without accident. Then they went forward almost in silence, pushing their way under the alders and birches, and stumbling over great stones that seemed purposely laid in the way for the molestation of travellers. Presently, they reached a wide level of emerald green, that looked smooth and tempting as “by-path meadow,” but was nearly as treacherous, being very much like a great wet sponge. The Velaysans knew the track; but, nevertheless, the cattle could not always be kept so closely to it as to escape some plunging and floundering in the marsh.

Thus the morning hours went by, with occasional snatches of talk when the road was easiest, till they reached Le Puy about an hour after noon.





CHAPTER III.

Le Puy.

IF St. Amable, who had such a sensitive nose that he struck a woman dead, says the legend, for burning bad oil in her lamp,—if St. Amable had entered Le Puy on this particular market-day, or on any other day of the year, his olfactory nerves would have received a shock which he might have taken a very unsaintly method of resenting.

This old cathedral-town, breathed upon on every sidé by the breezy mountain air, with every facility of drainage that a good fall could bestow, was then, as now, only one of the many illustrations that God made the country and man made the town ; God put within reach of the inhabitants everything that was needful for ventilation, and sweetness, and wholesomeness ; and man chose to neglect, pervert, and abuse the same, to that extent, that the senses of the inhabitants be-

coming deadened and depraved by the constant nuisances among which they drew their daily breath, had grown absolutely indifferent to the abominable odours they inhaled in their pent-up streets.

These streets, or alleys, were paved with great, irregular blocks of lava, over which horses, bullocks, and smaller quadrupeds stumbled and slipped with sore discomfort till they reached the market-place—"La Place de Breuil." Both streets and square were filled to overflowing with townfolk and market-people; women mounted astride on great, heavy farm horses laden with panniers, or driving mules and asses bearing poultry-coops, their sun-burnt, lively faces enclosed in snowy frilled caps, and overtopped by jaunty little flat beaver hats, with nodding plumes and gold sprays or buckles, their shrilly voices screaming to their companions from one end of the street to the other; men, lugging at their horses' mouths, or pricking on their cattle with goads, jostling, hallooing, swearing; children crying, singing, beating drums, blowing horns and whistles; vendors of cakes, fruit, and vegetables crying their commodities; sellers of relics, rosa-

ries, crucifixes, and pictures, carrying on a brisk competition in booths and stalls, on steps and in corners of churches and houses; pedlars, jugglers, and peep-show men; begging friars; church-bells clanging, the heavy cathedral clock striking; ballad-singers and guitar-players;—these and many more contributors to the general hubbub and confusion, caused poor Michel to look completely stupified, and even Colette to feel bewildered.

As they advanced up the precipitous alleys, their party gradually lessened and broke up. Bertrand gratefully bade them farewell, saying he should spend some time in the town and probably meet them again: Grégoire and his son proceeded to the market, after leaving their baggage in safeguard at a small hostelry where they were known; Christophe followed their example; and Gabrielle, remaining with the household stuff, cheerfully bade Colette farewell, saying she should look about for winter quarters without delay, and soon let Colette know where they were to be found.

Colette then proceeded with Michel on foot towards the upper part of the town, which is too steep to be ever invaded by sound of wheel or

hoof, and the deathlike stillness of which presents a singular contrast to the life and uproar below. Michel clung fast to her hand, looking alarmed at being jostled and shoved about by the townspeople, till, at the upper end of the alley, they suddenly came out upon the venerable cathedral, when he uttered a cry of joy and surprise, and drew Colette back to look at it.

She led him up the long flights of stone steps, disfigured by booths and stalls covered with medallions, pictures, and images of the famous "black Virgin," to the vast vaulted porch, beneath which they stood and reverently looked in at the inner door, supported on noble columns of porphyry. A rich odour of incense was stealing forth, and the faint sounds of sacred music issued from the choir. Colette reverently crossed herself as she thought how this cathedral was said to have been consecrated by the angels themselves; and how, when the bishop and his train first entered it, they heard celestial hymnings, from unseen psalmodists, pouring from the choir, and perceived the air to be perfumed with heavenly incense.

Michel would fain have entered, but she softly

said, "Another time," and led him away. As they departed, an ecclesiastic passed her, who stared at her so rudely that she thought "that man is not worthy of his office," and felt pained to have her chain of devout thoughts so broken. The relic-vendors importuned her noisily as she passed :—

"Buy a chaplet, my pretty maiden! Buy this image of our blessed Lady, the fac-simile, in little, of that holy image made by the prophet Jeremiah, and presented to our cathedral by King Dagobert."

"Not by Dagobert, you ignoramus!" cried an opposition vendor, "but by Haroun al Raschid!"

"By neither," shouted a third, lower down the steps, "but by Louis the Young!"

"You are all out," cried a fourth; "it was Philip Augustus!"

"It was none of them," shouted a fifth; "it was St. Louis!"

At this moment, the clatter of horse-shoes on the rough pavement was immediately succeeded by the apparition of a wild-looking little man with a bushy red beard, mounted on a superb charger, from which he threw himself and flung the reins

to an attendant ; and then ran up the steps, his black cloak flying out behind him, and the white plume in his flapped hat streaming in the wind.

“That’s one of the three saints !” ejaculated a relic seller.

“The Baron de St. Vidal, doubtless bearing some rich offering to our Lady,” said another ; “seldom enough he sets foot in a church.”

“No, but he reads his prayers punctually twice a day, so they say,” rejoined the first, “which is more than either of his brother saints pretend to.”

“The greater the saint, the greater the sinner,” muttered the other. “I mean, the greater the sinner the greater the saint,—which way is it ?”

“No great difference, maybe,” said the other, laughing, as he dusted some of his wares with an old handkerchief.

Meanwhile, Colette helped the weary Michel to ascend the steep, noiseless streets of the upper town, where the air was fresh and cool, and where scarcely a murmur from the noisy market broke the deep repose.

Many of the quaint old tenements in this quarter stood deserted and with open doors, their

occupants having descended to the busy market-place, unmolested by apprehensions of any intruders in their absence. Here and there a sleepy dog or blinking cat lay sentinel in door or window; here and there a merry bird in a cage poured forth its song unheeded; and here and there an aged grand-dame kept watch over a young child, or a thrifty lacemaker plied her bobbins at the threshold and hummed a drowsy ballad.

At length, in an alley, or rather single row of quaint old cottages, on a steeper acclivity than the rest, and only protected from the sheer precipice by a low parapet wall of lava blocks, Colette reached the ancient house in which her grandmother dwelt. That venerable lady, her withered cheeks surrounded by an unusually large and full frill, and attired in a dark woollen gown and bright yellow apron, was in the act of casting a tub of dish water and cabbage stalks over the parapet, on whatever might chance to be beneath, when her grandchildren came up.

“ So, here you are at last, young folks ! ” cried she, in a loud, cracked, cheerful voice, and strong patois. “ Marcelline ! Marcelline ! where are you ? Here they are ! ”

Marcelline came limping to the old, carved doorway, with a mixture of pain and pleasure in her face. Like too many of the inhabitants of Le Puy, she was very lame, owing to an unfortunate tumble down some steep place in her childhood, which had occasioned an injury that had been neglected till too late to remedy.

She was between thirty and forty; and had it not been for the contracted features which bespoke pain rather than peevishness, would have been not merely pretty but beautiful. As it was, no one thought of considering her either; but there was something interesting, and, to a few who knew her well, loveable, in the spare, oval face, regular features, smooth, colourless, olive skin, and languid, dark eyes, which now appeared under the deep shadow of the mossy porch.

Though Marcelline was no *religieuse*, she was *vouée au noir* by her mother in childhood, in hopes that the famous black Virgin would accept the compliment, and show her favour to her votary, by healing the lameness which had resulted from culpable carelessness. And though the years for which the vow had been taken had long since expired, Marcelline had become attached to her

sober dress, and adhered to it with a kind of vague feeling that it separated her from the world. Thus, though white and blue are considered the favourite colours of the Virgin, yet, in honour of the black image, which in Le Puy cathedral went by her name, Marcelline wore a loose, full dress of black serge, with long sleeves, and closing round her throat, while a rosary hung to her belt, and very little of her dark braided hair was seen beneath her plain white cap, which, unlike those of her townswomen, was without frills, and had long *barbes*, or lappets, frequently pinned over her head to be out of the way. The slight singularity of this attire had something in it that always pleased Colette's eye and fancy, and made her look on her aunt as something rather apart from, and superior to, the average.

Marcelline now gave her niece and nephew a cordial welcome ; and after much kissing and felicitating in the open air, they all followed her into the old lava-paved kitchen, where the *pot-au-feu* was still sending forth its savoury odours from the fire.

"Of course, we dined long ago," said Marcelline, "but we guessed you would come, and

come hungry, so we shall have the more leisure to help you, and talk while you are eating your soup. Why did not you come yesterday?"

"Ah, such a misfortune, aunt!" and poor Colette's lip began to quiver. "Let me do that," said she, hastily taking the basins and spoons from Marcelline, and relieving her of the task of spreading the table.

"My dear child, I have done nothing to-day," said Marcelline, "and you have had a long journey."

"Yes, but you are in pain."

"I almost always am, now—but tell me, what misfortune have you had?"

"Yes, tell us, my little cat," said Mère Suzanne, patting her on the shoulder, then giving Michel a loud kiss and wiping his face with her apron, and finally sitting down in an old black chair with her hands on her knees.

Colette related Christophe's misadventure, which excited much exclamation and commiseration.

"And where is he then, now?" said his grandmother, "since he has no stock to sell. Oh, the horse and cart—true; and the baggage. Here

he comes with a great load of bedding on his back."

Christophe came in very hungry, and very glad to have some soup. He said he had been lucky enough to get rid of the horse and cart to the keeper of the inn where they had stopped, and he should soon sell the poultry. After that, he would look about for some work ; and when he had got it, he would return for the night, and bring the rest of the baggage.

"Then, since you are returning to the market-place, Christophe," said his aunt, "you can order some lamp-oil for us, and some cheese, which will save me a painful walk. I can get down there pretty well, but find it mighty hard to come up again."

"You must let me do all your errands now, aunt," said Colette affectionately ; "I shall like it very much."

"Yes, yes, I mean to make you useful to me in many ways," said Marcelline, with a smile that had as much sadness as sweetness in it. "I have been counting on the trouble you would save me ever since I knew you were coming."

"I am so glad—what shall I do first? Clear

the table and wash up these spoons and basins? Yes, and then make up our beds. See, here is a nosegay of our last flowers in this basket for you. I will put them into a jar and set them out a little."

"Oh, how sweet they are!"

"And here are our eleven last eggs—and a pot of honey—and a bundle of sweet herbs—and some leeks and garlic. Some beet-root—a piece of pork—and a few sausages. That's all."

"And a good deal, too," said Marcelline kindly.

"What a smart little hat this is of thine, my pet!" said Mère Suzanne, sticking Colette's little hat on her fist, and examining it all round with satisfaction. "This lining of cherry-coloured velvet is absolutely charming, and it wants nothing but a little nodding plume. You shall have one, *chiffon!*"

Thus the afternoon passed in the greatest cheerfulness and harmony, and in great activity too, on the part of Colette, who, when she saw how increasingly painful every kind of bodily exertion had become to her aunt, insisted on sparing her every possible fatigue. They left Mère Suzanne

and Michel together, mutually content with each other's company; and betook themselves to the sleeping-room beyond the kitchen, in which Marcelline and her mother slept together, and where Colette now prepared to make up her bed in the corner, while her aunt sat on the ledge of her own bed, pressing her hand to her side.

"You seem to me worse, aunt, than I expected to find you," said Colette, as she untied the knots of her bundles.

"I *am* worse," said Marcelline. "I have pains and aches that I don't believe there are any words in our language to describe—and what would be the good of describing them, if they cannot be cured? I cannot bear to think how much money I have spent on medicine and advice that have made me no better; I have wearied our Lady with prayers, and myself with kneeling at her shrine; I have, besides, given her a large wax candle; so, what more can be done? Perhaps it is want of faith—" and she sighed.

"It cannot be that, in your case," cried Colette; "but perhaps more intercessory prayer may be effectual. I am sure I have prayed for you every night, and have even made poor Michel

say ' bless aunt Marcelline ;' but now I see you, I feel I have not been half fervent enough ; and I promise you, aunt, to pray for you a great deal more diligently."

Marcelline thanked her affectionately, and then said, " How have you and Christophe got on together this summer ? "

" Oh, he has been the best and kindest of brothers ! "

" Has he any thoughts of marriage ? "

" I believe he would like to have, if he were not so poor. Gabrielle would hardly accept him as he is."

" Why, her father is poor too."

" Oh, no, aunt ; not compared with us. We had one cow, and he had four ; we have a little field and a little vineyard, and he has a vineyard and three fields. We count him a rich man."

" You come of richer forefathers, though."

" What does that signify, now they are dead and gone, except that they have left us a few silver spoons ? And we must sell them next spring, perhaps, to help to buy a cow."

" Spring is a long time to look forward to," said Marcelline. " Perhaps Christophe will be

able to lay by a nice little sum during the winter. He is so active and industrious, he will be sure to get work. Michel looks well—his cheeks are quite fat.”

“Oh, and he is such a good, docile boy! It is impossible to help loving him. I do not think him nearly so dull as he was; he has learnt to say the Paternoster quite nicely. And God can understand him, if nobody else can but myself.”

“That’s true, Colette; come, you shall stow away all those things in the old cherry-wood *armoire*, and then we will go and give Michel his supper.”





CHAPTER IV.

The Black Lady.

WHEN Christopher returned with the remainder of the luggage, it proved that he had forgotten the oil ; and as he was anxious to begin looking out for employment, Colette offered to run down to the oil-shop and execute her aunt's errand.

As she passed through the market-place, the Baron de St. Vidal, accompanied by the bishop, rode by ; and with a laugh that had something terrific in it, he waved his hand towards a stake in the centre, and cried aloud, "Aha ! I trust we shall smell roast meat again there, by and by."

The bishop, who was a humane man, allowed this remark to pass in silence ; for the baron, who believed he had been cured of a severe fit of toothache by the Black Virgin, had just expressed his gratitude by presenting her with a candle as thick as his arm, of the very best wax.

Colette was returning with the oil when she met Gabrielle.

“ Well ! ” cried Gabrielle, “ I have lost no time since I saw you last. I have joined a company of our women ; we have chosen Babette Laroche for our head, put ourselves under the protection of the Black Lady, and hired a large upper room at the pottery shop over against the Golden Ball. Victorine Dumont and Marie Voisin are among us, so we are secure of mirth and of piety. Will not you like to be one of us ? ”

“ I have been thinking it over,” said Colette, “ and I believe I shall give it up. Aunt Marceline is in far worse health than I expected to find her, and I think I shall prefer remaining with her, and saving her as much fatigue as possible ; and working at my lace whenever I can.”

“ That will be horribly stupid,” said Gabrielle ; “ you will be moped to death, shut up with two old women and an imbecile boy in that dull quarter of the town ; and your work will amount to nothing if you subject yourself to continual interruptions.”

“ I know very well that I shall not do nearly as much,” said Colette ; “ but it seems to me to be

a greater duty, as well as comfort, to relieve my aunt, than to keep to my work and be able to say at the winter's end, I have made so many yards of lace."

"But the lace is for sale," rejoined Gabrielle, "and is not money-making, just now, your prime object?"

"A great one, certainly, but yet not my prime object—though it was so till I saw my aunt."

"But will not she be vexed at your getting behindhand? What will you do in the spring?"

"Spring is a long time to look forward to, as my aunt says," replied Colette, "so I will not think about it."

Gabrielle was going to reply, when a man with a struggling pig in his arms ran against them both, and nearly upset Colette's oil. At the same time, a group of itinerants began to sing a vociferous montagnard; wherefore the two girls, nodding a smiling adieu, went their several ways.

When Colette reached her grandmother's door, Christophe appeared to be standing under the porch. She laid her hand unceremoniously on his arm, saying, with a laugh, "Mind me and my oil!" when the young man turned about, and

looked full at her with an air of amused surprise. He was handsome and pleasant-looking, but not Christophe, nor a bit like him ; and Colette was so embarrassed at her mistake that she coloured all over and nearly dropped her jar. "Take care !" said he, preventing it from falling, "it would be a pity to spoil that pretty pink apron ;" and with a good-humoured smile, he walked away.

"Who is that ?" said Colette to her aunt.

"Victor Souvestre," replied Marcelline ; "he has just brought home my bird-cage, which he has been mending for me. He is always doing one good-natured thing or another."

And then, as it was growing dusk, she took the oil from Colette and began to trim the lamp ; while Michel, giving a loud yawn, warned his sister that it was time for him to go to bed. When she had heard him say his prayers, kissed him and tucked him up, she went out and joined Christophe, who was sitting astride on the low parapet, and humming—

"Young Aucassin loved Nicolette ;"

with one foot on *terra firma*, and the other dangling over a precipice of some hundred feet. He told her he had engaged himself to a canvas-

maker, brother-in-law to young Souvestre the shoemaker, who seemed to spend all his spare time in chatting with him. Then he told what wages he was to have, and began to reckon how much he should save, and how soon he should lay by the price of a cow. Then he bade her watch the kindling lights in the houses below, till the old city looked as if sprinkled with sparks; and they listened to the chimes, and the clocks, and the church bells, and the distant singing, hallooing, and laughing, all mingling into a wild harmony that had something plaintive in it. Then he began to hum one of his mountain songs, but fell quiet again, and kept gazing on the strange sugarloaf rock, seeming almost within a stone's throw in the deceptive twilight; and he noted the dusky forms of wagons and carts, and rustic parties returning to their village homes across the plain far below. Then he pointed out to his sister a distant light flitting here and there on the marsh, and said, "What do you think that is?"

"A lantern," said Colette.

"No; Le-Feu-Follet."

"Is it?" said she, with a little thrill.

“ Yes, this is just the sort of warm, close, steamy weather it likes—the evening of a market-day, too, when there are plenty of poor, silly people for the mischievous elf to lead astray.”

Colette crossed herself devoutly.

“ What a strange kind of creature it must be !” said she. “ I wonder what it does by day.”

“ Sleeps in some hole or cavern,” said Christophe decidedly, as if he knew all about it.

“ Did you ever hear anybody say positively he had seen it ?”

“ Oh, yes ; George Morin fell in its way one September evening, going home from a cattle-fair ; it dragged him through bushes and quagmires, and flung him into a pool, where he lay senseless till the next morning.”

“ Did he say what it was like ?”

“ No, not exactly ; but I’ve a very good notion of it—a grinning, big-headed goblin, with something malicious in its face.”

“ I should not like to be waylaid by him at all,” said Colette, shuddering.

“ Pooh ! not half so bad as being waylaid by routiers, I can tell you ! I know something of the one, if not of the other. By the bye, did

you hear the tale Gabrielle told, as we crossed the valley, of the Routier and the Noble Head?"

"No; how should I? My cart was in advance. What was it?"

"It sounded all the better from such merry, rosy lips. I shall maul it, I know. However, the gist of it was this: A pretty strong force of routiers having taken a town, one of them, passing an open door of a house, saw what he took for a sheep's head hanging up in the passage. Thought the routier, 'Here's a supper for me!' so he popped it into his bag, without much examination in the dusk, and proceeded to his quarters. On turning out his booty, however, you may guess his disappointment and disgust, on finding it to be the head of a man recently beheaded.

"'Humph!' thought he, 'this is not exactly what I expected. Bad as I may be, I am not yet a cannibal. By these long and soft curls of dark brown hair, and this well-trimmed moustache, I conclude this head to have been struck off the shoulders of some young nobleman, whose friends will not with indifference see it thrown to the dogs. I may, perchance, make money of it.'

“ On inquiry, he found that the head had indeed belonged to the young lord of a neighbouring castle, and that the house he had taken it from was that of the chief executioner.

“ As the castle was not far off, the routier started for it at once, carrying the head in his bag. The castle-gates had been torn off their hinges by the king’s orders, and the family banner lay trampled in the dust. A faithful old steward, with eyes red with weeping, received him without suspicion, and conducted him to the hall where the father of the young count sat disconsolate, teaching two pretty boys, his orphaned grandsons, to say their prayers. When the routier saw the old man thus engaged, his heart melted, and he stopped short at the threshold. The old count, seeing him there, laid aside his prayer-book and beckoned him forward, being surprised and somewhat consoled that any one should visit a house so disgraced. The routier, as he came to the castle, had thought of bowling the head out of the bag to the old man’s feet—”

“ What a wretch ! ” interrupted Colette.

“ Of course,” said Christophe. “ All the routiers are wretches, who live by their sins and their

swords. But this one, when he saw the old count's white locks, and the innocent faces of the two pretty boys, who, being dismissed from their prayers, ran off into a corner, relented, and thought he would hear what the old man had to say. The poor nobleman sat over the hearth, and seemed very low-spirited; and, the hail beginning to patter against the painted windows, he said in a dejected voice: 'No doubt, you have been driven into this house of misfortune because you could find shelter nowhere else.' 'Not so,' returned the routier; 'I am not one of those who run away from sorrow and trouble as if from the plague or the gallows. Weep on, my brave old Sir, if it relieves you; I will answer for it, he whom you lament deserved your tears.' 'Oh, indeed he did,' replied the sorrowing father; 'his enemies, who were devoured with envy of him, accused him of sorcery, and were resolved beforehand that he should die. I deplore not only his death, but the manner of it; his poor mangled remains have been deprived of their most noble member, which will be denied the rites of holy burial. Alas! it will be exposed on the gates of the town, where ravens will come

and . . .’ Here his tears prevented him from proceeding.

“ ‘ Surely, Sir,’ said the routier, ‘ now that the deed is done, the best way will be to think as little about it as possible. But I fear if a stranger like myself were to come to you with a bag of this sort, and tell you your son’s head was in it, you would faint with terror, or else cause him to be chased from your castle.’ ‘ Oh, no, indeed!’ said the old lord, ‘ I should esteem him my greatest benefactor, who had brought to me the most valuable gift on earth!’ ‘ Prepare yourself for a shock, then,’ said the routier, untying his bag, and taking out the head very gently, ‘ *for here it is!*’

“ The old count started up, and gazed on the routier for a moment with an air that was quite grand. Then, casting his eyes on the head, he burst into a passion of tears, exclaiming, ‘ O give it me! give it me! Heaven be praised! Our heads will now be laid together in the same tomb!’

“ The routier, much moved, gave it him respectfully in silence, and quitted the castle without asking for any reward. But the steward

soon came running after him with a heavy bag of money, in return for his sack with the head."

"Is that all?" cried Colette. "I should not think there were many routiers like that."

"There are good and bad of all sorts," said Christophe. "You should have heard Gabrielle tell the story."

And after a moment, he began to hum a hymn to the Virgin; and Colette, with her arm on his shoulder, softly sang with him.

The stars came out, one by one.





CHAPTER V.

Roast Chestnuts.

ALL at once a horrid glare of red light shone in the horizon.

“ Oh, see ! ” cried Colette, “ what’s that ? ”

“ A farm, or perhaps a village, set on fire by the routiers,” said Christophe, after a moment’s silence. Then drawing her closer to him,—“ That might have been our fate,” said he, in a low voice, “ had we tarried at home another night.”

“ Poor people ! who can tell what shocking things are happening among those flames ! ” said Colette.

“ Who, indeed ! ” repeated Christophe. “ However, perhaps the routiers are disappointed at finding the premises cleared out before their visit, and are taking the only revenge in their power by burning the mere walls and thatch.”

“ It can’t be *our* house,” said Colette, hastily.

“ No ; ours lies more to the south.”

“How shocking it is to look down on such scenes of distress, and be unable to give any help! And yet, how comfortable to be perched up here, shut in with strong gates, and surrounded by plenty of people, quite in safety!”

“Ah, don’t let us boast!”

“Why, what danger *can* there be?”

“Towns and cities have been sacked before now.”

Here their grandmother called them in.

A few days afterwards, Colette met Gabrielle with her pretty face disfigured with a large plaster.

“Why, Gabrielle!” cried she, “what *have* you been about?”

“Ah, you may well ask,” said Gabrielle. “Don’t laugh at me, for I feel very sore.”

“Sore! I should think so, if your hurt is as large as that plaster!”

“That it is, I can tell you; but I mean, I feel sore about my looks—I doubt if I shall not always have a scar. Did I not tell you we had hired a nice room at the potter’s, and chosen a head, and put ourselves under the special protection of the Black Lady? Well, who would have thought, after our doing that, of the floor giving way and

all of us falling through it into the ware-room below, with as little order as so many bricks,—tumbling among the pottery, breaking ever so much of it, besides cutting, bruising, and hurting ourselves? It was so though, I assure you!”

“I am very glad I was not among you,” said Colette; “was any one seriously hurt?”

“Nay; there were no bones broken, but every one was more or less disfigured. Victorine had her lip cut open; Marie has an eye like a half-ripe plum; Georgette has wrenched her wrist; and you *see* how I am hurt!”

“Yes. What a pity!”

“Moreover, we broke more pottery than we had earned money to pay for. My father advanced it, and we are to pay him by instalments; but it takes away one’s spirit in working, when it is only to pay off a debt. ’Tis a bad affair altogether. And what do you think the potter said? The floor had never given way before! And something he added about our seeming to be very heavy.”

“Have you found another lodging?”

“Oh, yes; a ground-floor room, but not half as cheerful and airy. When are you coming to see us? You have not been near us yet.”

“ I find so many things to do, to help my aunt. You know the work of the house is doubled.”

“ Yes; and you fritter away your time in peeling turnips and scraping carrots, and will not have made a dozen yards of lace by Christmas. Adieu! I shall run up to you some evening.”

In the afternoon, Colette was cleaning the silver spoons, when some one tapped at the door. She went to open it, and started when some one said, “ Will you buy——,” and then stopped short, and started too. They both laughed, for it was Bertrand,—and neither of them had expected to see the other.

“ So, here you are,” cried he cheerfully. “ You forgot to tell me where you were to be found.”

“ And you never asked ! Come in, pray.”

“ I will ; but first let me for a moment enjoy the superb prospect from this door. What a plain ! What a girdle of hills, crags, and mountains ! What eagles’ nests of castles perched on their summits ! The rivers, straying across the wide campaign, look like the blue veins on a lady’s white hand. The herds and flocks are mere specks. How singular is this needle-like rock,

springing up close at hand, and crowned with a church ! ”

“ That is the chapel of St. Michel ; it is not built on the rock, but hewn out of the rock itself. They call the rock L’Aiguilhe. There are two hundred and eighteen steps cut in it, by which to ascend to the chapel. Over the chapel-door is carved a woman with a fish’s tail.”

“ Hum ! Something like Dagon.”

“ They say idols were worshipped there formerly.”

“ Perhaps idols are worshipped there now.”

“ Hush !—I know what you mean ; but you should not say such things here. We are not in the plains of Le Velay.”

“ Too many of us have real though secret idols in our *hearts*,” said Bertrand ; “ worse ones, perhaps, than those that are hewn out of wood and stone, because they have a more deadening influence than an exterior object. For when some hidden idol engrosses all our thoughts, the idea of God grows gradually more dim. In many, this secret idol is *self*.”

“ Who is that you are talking with, Colette ? ” cried her grandmother.

“ Bertrand, grandmother.”

“ Bertrand *who* ? ”

“ How can I tell her what I don’t know ? ” said Colette, smiling at him. “ Come in, and tell her yourself. My poor aunt will, I think, like to see you; but she is in very great pain this afternoon.”

“ Who are you ? ” said Mère Suzanne, looking at him sharply as he entered.

“ Bertrand the pedlar, who owes a night’s lodging to your good grandchildren. Will you buy something ? ”

“ What have you got ? ”

“ You shall see,” said he, taking from his shoulders a much larger pack than he had carried before; and soon the table was covered with alluring handkerchiefs, ribbons, and apron-pieces, of the gayest dyes.

Selecting one of the prettiest aprons, he offered it to Colette, saying, “ I reserved this on purpose for you, whenever I should find you, in grateful remembrance of your hospitality.”

“ This is beautiful ! oh, thank you ! ” cried she, with delight. “ Look, aunt Marcelline ! ”

Marcelline was half lying on a settle, so much in the shade that Bertrand had not at first per-

ceived her. He carried some of his most tempting wares towards her, that she might gratify her curiosity without the trouble of rising ; leaving the pack and the remainder of its contents at the mercy of Mère Suzanne and Michel, who turned them out very completely.

“ That’s pretty,” said Marcelline. “ Oh ! ” wincing with pain as she moved a little.

“ You are suffering,” said Bertrand compassionately. “ Can anything be done to relieve you ? ”

“ Alas, no ! I have spent all my money on doctors, and all my energies in prayers.”

“ Can you sleep at night ? ”

“ No ; that is the worst of it—I lie awake for hours, unable to find respite from pain ; and that is what makes me feel so unrefreshed all day.”

“ Leave that alone, my little man,” said Bertrand hastily ; observing Michel trying to force open a small box. He took it from him, and returned with it to Marcelline.

“ I have a few medicines in my pack,” said he, “ and can give you one which, I think, may afford you rest, even without knowing more of your case than that you are sleepless. Will you try it ? ”

“ Well, I hardly know. What is it ? ”

“ If I gave you a long name, would you be any the wiser ? ”

“ Yes, I think so ; I do not even know *you*.”

“ Will it do me any good to harm you ? ”

“ But you might harm me without intending it.”

“ I might,” he said, smiling ; but with such a pleasant self-confidence in his look and tone, that Marcelline could not help feeling an inclination to trust him.

“ Let me see it,” said she.

“ There it is. *Now*, how much wiser you are ! ”

“ I like to examine it, nevertheless. I don’t know the smell.”

“ I am sure you do not.”

“ What is the price ? ”

“ I will give you a dose of it to-night, and call to see how you are to-morrow.”

“ Are you lodging near us ? ”

“ I have not been lucky enough yet to find a lodging, and have slept at a miserable *auberge* near the market-place. Do *you* take lodgers ? ”

“ No ; our house is full, now that my niece and

nephews are with us. But Geneviève Souvestre might take you in—she lives only two doors off : a poor widow woman ; but clean and obliging. You are not particular about your accommodation, I suppose ? ”

“ Oh, no, so that I have a quiet room to myself.”

“ To yourself ! I cannot say. Her son, Victor, would perhaps share it with you.”

“ That would not be quite pleasant—however, a pedlar must not be over-nice. I will go and speak to her presently.”

“ And, meanwhile, I’ll buy these aprons and this piece of ribbon,” said Mère Suzanne ; “ but they are too dear ! too dear ! ”

“ Well, what will you give me for them ? Beat me down a little.” And they laughed and chaffered over the goods till Mère Suzanne made a bargain quite to her satisfaction.

Michel was handling some small books, though he could not read them. Colette gently took them from him, and replaced them in the pack.

“ I thought,” said she to Bertrand, “ you only sold books.”

“ That would not do *here*. I am obliged to

hawk some more popular wares ; selling a book here and there, where I have an opportunity. Will *you* have one ? ”

“ Oh, yes, gladly ! Choose me one I shall like—how much ? ”

“ Oh, I can’t take money from *you*. How do you know you can trust me to choose you a good book, any more than your aunt can trust me to give her a good medicine ? ”

“ I do not know ; but, somehow, I *do* trust you.”

“ Well, your trust shall not be misplaced. Take this ; and if you like it, I will hereafter give you one you will like still better.”

So saying, he smilingly replaced the remainder of his property in his pack, and bade them farewell.

“ I like that man’s face,” said Mère Suzanne, “ but he speaks such bad patois, there is scarcely any understanding him.”

“ That is to say, he speaks French and not patois,” said Marcelline ; “ but I understood him very well.”

When Christophe returned, he said, “ Colette ! I’ve seen Gabrielle ! ” and burst out laughing.

“Is that the way you sympathize with her?” said Colette. “You cannot be much in love, I think.”

“Why, we came upon one another so suddenly, I was taken by surprise, and could not help grinning a little; and she was so hurt by it that though I truly told her the next moment, that I was very sorry for her, she would not believe it, and went away in anger. Where’s Michel?”

“Leaning over the parapet, looking at L’Aiguilhe.”

“Take care he does not fall over that parapet some day.”

“Oh, there is no danger—he is becoming more trustworthy every day, and I even think I shall soon be able to let him go to the cathedral by himself.”

“Why should you?”

“Because he is so fond of it, and it is not always convenient to me to go when he wishes it.”

Christophe made no answer, but went out and joined Michel, sitting in his favourite position, astride the low wall. Michel thought this clever, and aspired to imitate it: but Colette rushed out

and drew him back, while Christophe shook his head, frowned, and gave him to understand it was not to be thought of. Then Colette, with her hand still on Michel's shoulder, asked Christophe how he liked his master's brother-in-law, Victor Souvestre.

Christophe chewed a straw for some time without speaking; and, on the question being repeated, replied that there were some things he liked in him; others, not.

Beyond this oracular reply, he said nothing. A fragment of the stone wall became dislodged by his foot, and fell far down a perpendicular descent into a small pool of water in a fissure of the rock. Michel, delighted at hearing the splash, immediately began casting pebbles after it; and finally, when tired of this employment, he began to fling small stones hither and thither, setting up a wild, delighted laugh when they rebounded against wall or rock.

"Oh, fie!" said Colette, "you must not do that! See, you have hit the crucifix on the wall. Fie, Michel; pray, pray."

And she put up her joined hands in the attitude of prayer towards the crucifix, as if in sup-

plication for forgiveness, meaning him to do the same; but Michel was naughty just then, and would not follow the lead, but laughed and threw more stones in the same direction, just escaping the crucifix,—whether intentionally or not, it was not easy to tell. Colette, who made a great point of his implicit obedience, frowned and chid him, without severity; and as his reckless humour seemed rather increasing, the matter was becoming serious enough for Christophe to turn about upon him with a grave “Come, youngster!”—when Michel, laughing, staggered into the house; and Colette followed him just as Fabien came up to the door.

“So you have found us out at last,” said Christophe, cheerfully. “How’s Gabrielle this evening?”

“She—why, you saw her yourself in the afternoon, so you know pretty well. Why did Colette go away directly she saw me?”

“She is gone to send Michel to bed,” said Christophe. “I don’t believe she saw you.”

“I know she did, though! She didn’t turn her head, but she turned her eye.”

“She’ll be here again directly,” said Chris-

tophe, "or else we will go in and look after her. How do you like your new work?"

"Like that!" snapping his fingers. "The pay is good, but the master crusty."

"Never mind that, since he pays well."

"I don't know—we shall see." And they began to talk over their several employments, employers, fellow-workmen, and wages.

"I wonder Colette don't come, though," said Fabien presently, having kept his eye all the while on the door; "suppose we go in."

"Oh, it is pleasanter here, in the fresh air. My grandmother has been making a decoction of rue; you won't like the kitchen."

"I doubt if my nose is as quick-scented as some people's," said Fabien. "Onions, now! I like them."

"So do I,—to eat; but not for a nosegay." They continued to chat in a desultory way, till it grew dark, and they could see Colette lighting a lamp, which threw her pretty profile in shadow against the wall.

"She's there now, at any rate," said Fabien. "Come, let us go in."

“Rue and all,” said Christophe reluctantly, as he prepared to quit his favourite hobby.

Just then, a handsome, smart-looking young mechanic passed them, nodded blithely to Christophe, and went into the house.

“Who’s that?” said Fabien quickly.

“Souvestre, a fellow-workman of mine, a capital fellow. My grandmother knows him very well—he’s always out and in.”

Fabien followed Christophe into the kitchen, but with a brow as dark as night. Victor was already established *en ami intime* immediately before the fire, setting chestnuts to roast, which he pulled out of his pocket, and singing—

“Ahi, bouladge! Ahi, bouladge!”





CHAPTER VI.

Where the Shoe pinches.

“**R**UE, indeed! *I’ll* rue them!—or rather, make them rue,” muttered Fabien between his teeth, as he left Mère Suzanne’s kitchen that night. They had been very merry round the fire, roasting the chestnuts and burning their fingers; but, somehow, Fabien had not shone. He was jealous of Victor’s position in the circle, jealous of his laughing ease, and good looks; and thought Colette very provoking in bestowing more smiles on him than on himself. He comforted himself with, “Ah, well, *I’ll* bring her some chestnuts to-morrow;” but still he could not feel friendly towards her or Victor: and, before the evening ended, they had a downright-misunderstanding. This was smoothed over, chiefly for manners; but Fabien went home sulky.

As for Victor, he left the house half an hour afterwards with a gay smile on his lips; but this

did not last to his own home, which was next door but one; and in place of going in to bed, he leant over the parapet, chewing the cud of his own meditations for half an hour or more. When his mother, at length spying him out, begged him to come in, as she wanted to lock up for the night, he obeyed her in silence, and ate his supper moodily, while she told him that her new lodger had already retired to bed.

When Victor entered the room where he expected to find Bertrand asleep, he saw, by the light of the moon, that he was on his knees. So he undressed, and took possession of his own bed before the pedlar had ended his prayers, and lay as still as a mouse for about an hour.

At the end of that time, he began to toss about and sigh heavily. Bertrand asked him if he were in pain, to which he shortly replied in the negative, and then lay very quiet.

Bertrand now lay awake; but apparently the youth fell into uneasy sleep, from which he presently awoke himself by saying, "I wish you were dead!"

"Me?" cried the pedlar.

"No," crustily replied Victor, ashamed of

having spoken. "Why do you lie awake there, listening to my thoughts?"

"My good fellow, I lie awake only because you keep me awake. I hope it will be allowed for in your bill."

Victor gave an unwilling grunt, meant for a laugh of courtesy.

"Who did you wish dead?"

"Care."

"Hum! I never was so imaginative as to personify care, and talk to it."

"Very likely."

"Allow me to ask—in all civility—are you in love?"

"In love!" repeated Victor, laughing scornfully. "My care is about another sort of thing, I assure you. Besides," in a gentler voice, "if I were in love, what is that to you?"

"I beg your pardon for so impertinent a question."

"Oh, no!" groaned Victor, "that's not it—though I may be a little in love too. The fact is, I have a job of work to do, that I don't like doing at all."

"Is that all?"

“Wait till you know what it is, before you think that not enough.”

“Well,” said Bertrand, after a pause of about five minutes, “have I waited long enough?”

“Why, you didn’t think I was going to tell you—did you?”

“I was under that impression.”

“A mistake—quite a mistake! Good night!”

“Good night!”

“I say ——” resumed Victor presently.

“Well,” said Bertrand, rousing up.

“I saw you saying your prayers before you went to bed——”

“I didn’t see you say yours.”

“That’s neither here nor there. To whom were you praying?”

“Is not that as inquisitive a question as mine was to you? However, I will tell you—to God.”

“Why not to our Black Lady?”

“I know nothing of your Black Lady, and am not of the opinion that she knows much of me.”

“Ha! Do you know you have said a dangerous thing?”

“Young man, I never falter at danger, when it is in connexion with truth.”

“That’s fine !” cried Victor, starting up. “Do you find you can act it out ?”

“Thus far, I have done so.”

“You seem sincere—I wonder if you are safe. Who are you ?”

“Why should you suppose me anything but what I seem ? I see no occasion for relating my history.”

“No,—and yet—I should like to think you were honest.”

“Try me !—trust me !”

“Come, I will. Of course, you know that we possess one of the Virgin’s shoes ?”

“No, I did not,” said Bertrand, laughing.

“What, you and your mother ?”

“No, no ; we people of Le Puy—our cathedral. It was bestowed on us by St. George.”

“Oh, indeed ! Why did not he give you the pair ?”

“Well, I suppose others have asked that question so often that the Bishop begins to find it inconvenient. At any rate, he had me up to him to-day, privately, to ask me to make its fellow. Now, this staggered me.”

“Why should it ?”

“ Why !—why, because he charged me to keep the matter close. The shoe is, doubtless, to be supposed to be supplied by a miracle ! ”

“ I always understood your Bishop was a clever man,” said Bertrand, “ but this proves him to be a very silly one. Why could he not have sent the pattern shoe to Paris, with orders for another to match it, without saying a word about the use that was to be made of it ? ”

“ Because that would have taken time and trouble,” said Victor, “ and he fancied himself quite certain of me. But, you see, a fraud sticks in my throat ; and not only that, but the fraud about the new shoe makes me doubt in the old one ! ”

“ Doubt in it ! ” cried Bertrand, “ why, who ever made it the anchor of your faith ? You may go to heaven, I suppose, without faith in an old shoe ! ”

“ Ah, but it shakes my faith in better and higher things, because we have them all on the same authority.”

“ That I deny.”

“ But can you prove that we do not ? ”

“ Yes.”

And a conversation ensued between them which was destined to have important results.

When Mère Suzanne and her family assembled at breakfast the next morning, Michel was not forthcoming. Colette went to call him, and found him so soundly asleep that she tried in vain to rouse him. She thought he might as well have his nap out, and they breakfasted without him.

An hour or so afterwards she went to him again, and found him still in such profound repose, that she became frightened, and shook him roughly. After two or three shakes, he awoke, looking rather mazy, but, seeing her, smiled, and rose up without a word. When he was dressed, she gave him his breakfast, which he did not seem to care for; and, after one or two spoonfuls, he left it, and went out to the parapet wall, whereon he lay all along, basking in the warm autumn sun, in that drowsy kind of state in which *crétins* pass the greater part of their lives.

Meanwhile Bertrand looked in on Marcelline.

“How are you this morning?” said he.

“Much easier, thank you,” she replied.

“Did you sleep well?”

“ Very well.”

“ I knew you would !”

“ Did you ? ” said she, smiling. “ Then how is it that such a sagacious person does not also know that I did not take his medicine ? ”

“ Oh, why not ? ” said Bertrand, looking disappointed.

“ I lost it.”

“ Then Michel must have taken it,” exclaimed Colette. “ I now remember seeing him chewing something and making wry faces, yesterday, after Bertrand left us. I put my finger towards his mouth, intending to take out what was in it, but he gulped it down, made another wry face, and went away smiling.”

“ Well, *he* had a good night, I fancy, at any rate,” said Bertrand.

“ We could hardly waken him this morning ; and he is quite stupid still.”

“ So that, altogether, I am glad I did not take the drug myself,” said Marcelline, “ since you see, I had a good night without it, and can ascribe it to God’s direct goodness, without the intervention of any means.”

“ That is a very good way of viewing it,” said

Bertrand. "How often we lose the benefit and comfort of direct communion with God, by interposing this and that object between us! With regard to the intercessions of saints, for instance. —That young lad is wide awake enough now, I see! He is flinging stones."

"He learnt that of Christophe," said Colette, hastily going to the door. "Michel! you must not do that!"

Michel paused for a moment with a stone in his hand, uncertain whether to fling it or not. Just then, the cathedral bell began to ring for prayers; and, dropping the stone, he was moving off towards the cathedral, but Colette led him back to the porch, and gave him a toy to play with.

She found Bertrand and Marcelline in conversation that seemed to interest them both; and her aunt's face was so lighted up and free from its usual look of pain, that Colette, for the first time, was struck by its latent beauty. She drew near them, and soon became an attentive listener; for they were discussing some of the vital themes which were then beginning to agitate all France. Time insensibly passed on, till Bertrand remem-

bered he had business which called him elsewhere, and prepared to depart.

“Where’s Michel?” cried Colette, in dismay, neither seeing him in the porch nor anywhere in sight.

Her first impulse was to run and look over the cliff, but she saw no trace of him. Then she ran down the row of houses, asking the lacemakers who sat at their doors, if they had seen him pass. One of them said, yes;—the others had been too deep in gossip to notice him.

“He has, doubtless, gone towards the cathedral,” said Colette. “How wrong I was to lose sight of him so long!”

“Never fear,” said Bertrand, who had come up with her, “he cannot travel very fast at his best; I will look about for him.”

“Thank you; but I must likewise look for him myself. How wrong I was!”

Close within the cathedral choir she found Michel perfectly safe, kneeling a little apart from the rest, and looking on with an air of profound but bewildered awe at the imposing scene before him; while the music that was pealing around seemed to excite in him a mute ecstasy.

Colette, thankful to have found him, knelt down by his side, and joined in the devotions. Then, when the service was over, she took his hand and led him home.





CHAPTER VII.

Lost, Stolen, or Strayed.

THE next morning, Michel was missing again. Colette, provoked with herself for having lost sight of him for a few minutes, ran down towards the cathedral, with very little alarm, being persuaded she should find him within its precincts. The upper town was as quiet as usual; here and there an open door showed a busy housewife preparing the soup, or a pale lacemaker twisting her bobbins, but all in such quiet that the mewing of a stray kitten might be heard from one end of the quarter to the other. In the Place de Breuil, however, it was widely different—groups of townspeople talking loud, or gaping in stupid wonder, were assembled under the tall old trees, or in the open space in the midst of the picturesque square. She was too much pre-occupied to pay great attention to any affairs but

her own ; but she heard, without much heeding, a few broken sentences, such as “ A Sacramentarian must have done it.”—“ I thought we had none here.”—“ Don’t believe it ! They have their secret meetings and pass-words everywhere.”—“ There are strangers lurking about the town.”—“ They say the boy has done it.”

It was not service-time, but Colette swiftly passed through the open door of the cathedral, and glided through and around the interior, looking everywhere for Michel, but in vain. She asked two or three persons if they had seen him, but was answered in the negative. Her uneasiness now became great ; she renewed her search, hoping to find him in some nook or corner, perhaps asleep : at length, in great trouble, she went forth, and descended the steps, inquiring of the relic-sellers, “ Have you seen my brother ? ” They were chattering to each other, and gave her little heed, answering in the negative.

Then she entered the steep, narrow, noisy streets, not knowing which direction to take, and inquired at a few shops where she had had small dealings. Quitting one of these, she almost ran against her friendly old neighbour Grégoire, whom

she eagerly asked her often-repeated question, "Have you seen my brother?"

"I know where he is," replied he, "and was coming to tell you. They have carried him before the Bishop and Chapter."

"Before the Bishop and Chapter!"

"And all along of my own stupid son, I am sorry to say. An outrage has been committed during the night; a crucifix has been broken to pieces and destroyed, and the clergy are outrageous and have stirred up the people, who are in a great tumult also, as they venerated it much; and every one is afraid of being accused of having done it."

"What has that to do with Michel?"

"My boy Fabien, hearing people talk of it in the street, foolishly said, 'I know a young chap that has thrown stones at it'—which somebody caught up and carried to the authorities, who, to his no small surprise, had him taken into custody. I was from home, and knew nothing of what had passed till a neighbour told me Fabien had been summoned before the consuls. I hastened after him, but was too late. He had been examined, and had admitted that, an evening or two ago,

he had seen poor Michel casting stones at a crucifix."

"Oh! how *could* he?——" cried Colette, with tears of grief and indignation bursting from her eyes.

"So they had sent to apprehend Michel," continued Grégoire, "without regarding Fabien's saying he was half silly; because, look you, if they could prove it against him, everybody else would be cleared."

"Of course,—poor, afflicted orphan!" sobbed Colette. "I must go to him."

"Don't give way so," said the good natured farmer, "for, doubtless, he is either set free by this time or will be so directly;—you know they can't punish a fool!"

"Knaves may," said Colette bitterly; "they may say he is less a fool than he seems. I must go!"

"And I must go with you," said Grégoire, "and would do so even though your trouble were not brought about by my own son. He might as well have kept his tongue between his teeth."

"Malicious!"

“No, no ; don’t say that, Colette ; but very, very stupid. Ha ! see, here comes Christophe ! —and Michel with him !”

Colette flew towards them, and overwhelmed Michel with a shower of kisses and tears. His face was smeared with crying, already ; he was breathing hard, and looked heated, frightened, and more bewildered than ever.

Christophe also was very hot, and much agitated.

“How angry you must be with me, Christophe,” said Colette, sobbing, “for losing sight of him.”

“If you had n’t, it would have been just the same,” said Christophe ; “the consuls had given orders for his being taken before them, and you could not have hindered it ; but Fabien—” and his eyes flashed fire.

“Ah, you attribute to him worse feeling than he had,” interposed Grégoire, “but I can’t expect you to have patience with him just now. Tell us how it all happened.”

“I was at work, when Souvestre came in breathlessly, and said, ‘They are taking your brother before the consuls, I know not for what.’

Of course, I started up, crying, ‘Come with me,’ and we ran off together, and got to the door just as the constables were taking him in. There was such a crowd that at first I could not get near him, till I cried, ‘Pray let me pass—I’m his brother—he’s a crêtin.’ Then they made way for me, and I got nearly up to him, but not quite, but near enough to exchange looks; and his were so frightened!—”

Christophe’s throat swelled, and he was obliged to pause for a moment. Grégoire kindly laid his hand on his shoulder.

“I’m out of breath,” said Christophe, to excuse his emotion to himself. “Well, to my surprise, who should I see but Bertrand the pedlar in custody, along with Michel. Victor drew my attention to it; and having his mind more disengaged than mine was, he said to some one near him, ‘Hallo, how comes that pedlar under arrest? what has he done?’ ‘Nothing, that I know of,’ said the other, who it seems lives in our quarter, a few doors below us, ‘but he is suspected of a good deal. I was sharpening a clasp-knife on my door-step, the idiot-boy standing by and looking on, when the constables

came up, laid hold of him, and said, "You must come along with us!" I jumped up, and cried, "Hold! don't take the poor child, he's a fool"—"Knaves or fools, he must come before the consuls," said one of the constables, "for he's under suspicion." So I seized my cap and prepared to go with them, not liking, d'ye see, to stand by while a neighbour's child was endangered: and started forth, with only time to call out to my wife, "Michel is in custody—tell Colette!"—whether she heard me or no, I had not time to ascertain. And, just as we were going by your door, out came that man. "How now, Michel," says he, "where are they taking you?" On which, one of the constables, turning about, collared him, and said, "To the same place we are going to take *you*, master; for you are under suspicion, for more than one thing, I can tell you!" The pedlar looked surprised, but did not offer any resistance, and I suppose we shall soon hear what they have to allege against him. All the while the man was saying this, we were pushing through the door and up the stairs; and presently we got into the justice-hall, but quite at the back of the crowd. However, I could catch glimpses, now

and then, of the Bishop, and other ecclesiastics, sitting at the upper end. They asked Michel who he was; he could not answer intelligibly. They were repeating the question more roughly, when I cried out, 'He's a crêtin—I'm his brother!' So then they had me forward, and I told how he was half-witted from his birth; and Fabien confirmed it, in a blundering, dogged sort of a way, and said he'd never said the boy broke down and destroyed the crucifix—he had only seen him throw stones. I cried indignantly, 'Pebbles!—Could these hands cast stones?'—and held one of them up, by the poor, dangling wrist. There was a murmur in the court. The Bishop said, 'But the will was evil, if not the deed. Why cast even a pebble at the holy sign of our redemption? The child must have been ill-taught.' I said, 'My lord Bishop, he was taught his prayers in his infancy, and murmurs them, in his inarticulate fashion, day and night, and has a profound reverence for holy things, and would live constantly, if he could, in the cathedral.' "

"Well said, Christophe!" exclaimed Grégoire and Colette.

"Well, the Bishop said so too," observed

Christophe, stroking his hair with complacence ; “ and after a good many more questions, to find out whether we were at all liable to suspicion, either as sacrilegious ourselves, or accustomed to associate with the sacrilegious, Michel was pronounced *nompus compus*, or something of that sort, and set free—and glad enough I was to pounce upon him and bring him off.”

“ And what became of Bertrand ? ” inquired Grégoire.

“ Truth to say,” replied Christophe lightly, “ he was not so important to me as my only brother, and I did not trouble my head about him. Doubtless, he will be let off too, unless he be really convicted of something wrong ; and then, you know, he will deserve to be punished.”

“ How can such a man as that be convicted of destroying the crucifix ? ” said Grégoire, rather angrily.

“ Why, what do you know of him ? ” said Christophe, with surprise. “ Have you ever seen him since we journeyed together to Le Puy ? ”

“ Yes, daily ;—however, that’s neither here nor there ; but a man such as his discourse tells you he is, might attempt to convert you

by argument, but would not destroy public property."

"Perhaps not," said Christophe, "but we know so little,—at least, I know so little about him (and I did not suppose that you knew more), that I'm not quite prepared to take up the cudgels about him. Still, I shall be glad to know he's safe, now that I am at ease about Michel; and if you will stay to dine with us, I dare say we shall be able to hear everything from Victor, who will be returning to dinner too, and who stayed to hear the matter out. He lives but two doors off, and I'll fetch him in."

"Well,—I will gladly do so," said Grégoire, who by this time had accompanied them nearly to their own door. "I shall renew with pleasure my acquaintance with Mère Suzanne and your good aunt Marcelline; and I confess I shall be anxious to know what passed between the consuls and Bertrand."

Marcelline, who knew nothing of what had been occurring, received Grégoire cheerfully, and looked with surprise at the excited faces of Colette and Christophe.

"What is the matter?" said she.

“ Michel has been before the consuls,” said Colette, bursting into tears.

Marcelline looked petrified ; and Christophe, seeing his sister unable to speak, repeated the story.

Marcelline brushed away a few tears ; and just then, Mère Suzanne entered, wiping the dough off her hands, (for she had been bread-making,) and the tale had to be told all over again, interrupted by continual interjections from the garrulous old lady, who ended by hugging and kissing Michel, and leaving his face streaked with flour. Colette, meantime, was working off her superfluous excitement by laying the cloth, arranging the silver forks and spoons, fetching a curious old “ parcel-gilt goblet,” only used on rare occasions, for Grégoire, dressing the salad, and pouring out the soup. Christophe went to look for Victor, but came back without him, saying he had not returned ; and Grégoire, looking disappointed, sat down with the rest, and began to eat his dinner abstractedly. Some desultory speculations were made as to who had destroyed the crucifix ; but Colette was silent, and her eyes filled whenever she turned them towards Michel,

who was supping his milk porridge as if nothing had happened, daubing himself terribly during the process. Marcelline, who had had no anxiety about him before seeing him to be safe, had thoughts sufficiently disengaged from him to bestow some anxious ones on Bertrand, and Mère Suzanne soon had nearly all the conversation to herself.

Christophe soon rose from the table, to look after Victor, and went out and did not immediately come back. Grégoire, having waited for him a little with ill-concealed impatience, arose to depart. Just as he was awaiting the end of Mère Suzanne's long history of the silver tankard, Victor came in, looking pale and serious, and was followed by Christophe.

"They have him in ward," said he, in an undertone; "the examination was a long and unsatisfactory one."

Christophe gave him a chair, and they all sat down around him, except Michel, who fell sound asleep in a corner.

"They asked him his name," said Victor. "He gave it: 'Bertrand.' 'Bertrand what?' 'Bertrand de la Vigne.' '*Melan* de la Vigne,'

cried somebody; 'ask him if his name be not Melan.' But he was meanwhile being interrogated as to his calling. 'A pedlar.' 'Where was his licence?' He produced it. His name there stood Beltran. 'That was an error; and the *d* final had been accidentally effaced by some acid.' 'Was he sure his name was not Melan?' 'Quite sure.' 'Had he never heard of the name Melan in connexion with de la Vigne?' 'Oh, yes; there was or had been a Melan de la Vigne in Meaux.' 'Was he any relation of his?' Bertrand was silent. The Bishop then repeated the question authoritatively. 'Yes, that Melan had been his uncle, but he was dead.' 'Had he not been a heretic?' 'No.' 'What was he?' 'A bookseller.' 'Booksellers are never heretics, of course,' said somebody, half aside, on which others laughed; but were silenced by a frown from the Bishop. 'How long had Bertrand been a pedlar?' 'About a year.' 'But his licence was made out for a longer time.' 'Yes, but he had not used it.' 'What had he previously been?' 'A printer.' 'At Meaux?' 'No, not at Meaux.' 'Where then?' 'At Paris.' 'How long?' 'Several years.' 'How

many?' 'Five.' 'That only accounted for a small part of his life—how old was he?' 'Forty.' 'Where was he born?' 'In Paris?' 'What was his name?' 'Bertrand de la Vigne.' "

"He had said that before," said Marcelline.

"Yes, but they wanted to catch him up. They had hoped he would say Melan. 'What were the names of his parents?' 'Bertrand and Desirée de la Vigne.' 'How many uncles had he?' 'None.' '*None?*' 'He had *had* one, Melan, who was dead.' 'What was his father?' 'A printer.' 'Had he worked under his father?' 'Yes.' 'Were those the five years he had spoken of?' 'No, those were since he had come to man's estate.' 'How many brothers and sisters had he?' 'He had had two of each, but one brother had died in infancy, and both his sisters had died young.' 'What were his brothers' names?' 'Antoine and Melan.' 'Humph!—Which had died?' 'Antoine.' 'Where was Melan?' 'He did not know.' 'Was he alive?' 'He could not tell.' 'Was he a heretic?' 'He could not say.' 'What was he?' 'He could not affirm.' 'What had he been?' 'A very good man.' 'What had

been his mode of life?' 'That of a saint.'
'But what was his occupation or calling?'
'Doing good.' 'How?' 'By teaching.' 'Teaching what?' 'The will of God.' 'Was he a priest?' 'He had been intended for one.' 'But had never taken holy orders?' 'No.' 'In fact, he was a heretic?' 'No.' 'What then?' 'As good a Christian as ever lived.' 'Had he ever been *called* a heretic?' 'Nay, that did not prove him one, any more than if he, Bertrand, were to call one of the worshipful consuls so, it would prove him one.' (The consuls crossed themselves at this, in holy horror.) 'What was he doing in Le Puy?' 'Selling handkerchiefs, ribbons, and such-like.' 'What else?' 'Going from house to house.' 'What else?' 'Eating such things as were set before him.' "

"Served 'em right," cried Mère Suzanne, "I wonder at the man's patience, when they so badgered him."

"Well, they went on in this style two hours or more," said Victor; "in short, till the apprehension of somebody else gave them something else to do. They asked him his name again and again, trying to make him betray that it was

Melan. They tried to make it out he had had some hand in breaking the crucifix ; but there I came to his aid ; for it had unquestionably been done in the night, and I took an oath that we had slept in the same room all night long."

"It was a pity you should get mixed up with him, though," said Mère Suzanne.

"Not at all," said Victor ; "it was my plain duty."

"He did quite right," said Grégoire and Christophe decisively.

"Quite right," echoed Marcelline and Colette.

"Then they catechized *me*," continued Victor ; "but I soon satisfied them, especially as I said, 'My lord Bishop knows me well,'—giving him a look out of the corner of my eye."

"Why, what does he know of you?" said Marcelline.

"That's of no moment just now," replied Victor. "It was quite sufficient. He said briefly, he knew me for a simple, honest fellow, and they immediately ceased examining me ; and it went some way with them with respect to Bertrand, too ; for they said, 'We have given sufficient attention to this case at present, as

there are many others to examine ; let the man be remanded till to-morrow.' "

" What a shame ! " cried Marcelline. " Why could they not have dismissed him ? They ought to have done so."

" ' Ought ' and ' did ' are different things," said Victor. " So he was marched off under arrest. My own opinion is that he is Melan de la Vigne, after all ! "





CHAPTER VIII.

The Mysterious Stranger.

“**N**O, he is not,” said Grégoire abruptly.
“How do you know?” cried Victor, with surprise.

“Because I have seen Melan. But, no matter for that. You may believe every word this man has said—he is a truth-teller.”

“I am convinced of it myself, short as my knowledge of him has been. A man who prays and talks as he does, must have the fear of God before him.”

“I am glad to hear you say so,” said Grégoire, cordially stretching out his hand to him. “Surely, we all think alike of him here?”

“I believe so,” said Christophe, looking rather doubtfully towards his grandmother.

“Oh, the man’s a good man,” said Mère Suzanne, “and I’m sorry they have him in ward.”

"Then let us pray for his release," said Grégoire. "When St. Peter was cast into prison, prayer was made without ceasing of the church for him, and we know with what success. Let us pray."

And reverently kneeling down, in which he was joined by all his companions, though Mère Suzanne looked a little surprised, the good farmer offered up a short fervent prayer. When they arose, he again grasped Victor's hand, said something in an under tone to him and to Christophe, which received an affirmative reply from both, and then briefly bidding the women farewell, he took up his cap and departed. The two young men talked to one another at the window for a short time, and then returned to their work, leaving Mère Suzanne, Marcelline, and Colette rather mystified at what had been going on during the last few minutes.

"And, all this while, not a drop of water in the house!" exclaimed Mère Suzanne, whose thoughts were always eminently practical.

Marcelline, who had been about to speak, mechanically turned towards the large pitcher she had been accustomed to fill at the fountain, and

was raising it with a look of weariness, when Colette smilingly took it from her and hastened forth.

When she returned with her burden, which was in somewhat less than an hour, Marcelline gratefully lifted it down and thanked her for saving her such a painful labour.

“Oh, I had my reward,” said Colette cheerfully; “for there is always plenty of gossip going on among the water-carriers.”

“Well mayst thou say so, child,” cried Mère Suzanne; “many a match is made and marred, many a good name evil spoken of, and many an absolute lie circulated among those idle baggages. Well, and what were they saying to-day? something they had better have held their tongues about, I’ll warrant thee.”

“Well, grandmother, they were chiefly talking about this affair of the crucifix, because some of them had husbands or brothers who had been arrested or examined, and they were very indignant about it and rather frightened. There were a few who held their peace, and heard everything with looks that seemed to betray they did not agree with the others. But what think you, grand-

mother? They say the Terrible Baron is coming to sack Le Puy!"

"Sack Le Puy!" cried Mère Suzanne with ineffable disdain. "Let him only come and try, that's all! I fancy he would break his teeth on our stone walls. Why, the women might keep him off with their mops!"

"Ah, don't talk in that way, mother, I pray you," said Marcelline; "if there be one thing more than another that makes me superstitious, it is boasting. Evil is sure to follow it."

And sighing deeply, she took some of the water from the pitcher Colette had filled, and began to wash the six silver spoons and forks.

"Michel has bitten this spoon," said she; "he must have a leaden one."

"He'll bite a leaden spoon through and through," said Mère Suzanne; "but I have a nice bone one somewhere, that will do for him exactly, if I can but find it. I may as well hunt for it at once."

Christophe did not return to supper at the usual time. The days were now very short; Colette went to look out for him, and, in the dusk, thought she saw him coming; but it proved to be Fabien.

“Why, Fabien,” said she indignantly, “I wonder you are not ashamed to show your face among us !”

“Don’t be angry with me,” said Fabien, “you know I meant no harm—who could have thought they would arrest a crêtin ?”

“It was very mean of you to tell tales,” retorted Colette, “and I can’t forgive you. You know very well, he only cast pebbles at random, and could not have hit the crucifix if it had been to save his life.”

“Of course, I knew it,” said Fabien humbly, “and thought they would know it too—I only named him just to divert their attention. In short, I can’t think how his name ever slipped out of my mouth. You know very well, Colette, I would not harm anything belonging to *you*.”

“Well, I hope you will never do us such an ill turn again,” said she, softening a little. “‘Had I wist’ is a poor compensation when the mischief is done.”

“Gabrielle wants you to come down and sup with us,” said Fabien. “Will you come ?”

“Not to-night, thank you—I am wondering why Christophe does not return.”

“ Oh, I can tell you—he and his friend Souvestre are with us. My father is getting up a prayer-meeting, or something of that sort ; so, as I could very well be spared, I thought, as they were there, I could be here. Exchange is no robbery, you know,” said Fabien, with an embarrassed laugh ; “ and I’ve brought you some chestnuts.”

“ Thank you,” said Colette, with indifference, as he emptied his pockets, “ though I am not particularly fond of them.”

“ There, now ! Why, did not you say those that Souvestre roasted for you were the best you had ever eaten ? ”

“ Oh, Fabien !—As if you two could have but one idea between you !—They might have been the best, without being much worth having, after all.—Besides, variety is charming.”

“ Girl, girl, don’t snap the lad up so,” cried Mère Suzanne. “ I never like to hear young maids and men say rude things to one another.”

“ There now ! ” said Fabien, elated at having an ally, and sitting down before the fire exactly in Victor’s place and posture. “ If I had known you preferred apples, I would have brought

apples ; or if I had known you preferred pears, you should have had pears, but I thought you liked chestnuts, and so I brought them."

"The lad can't speak fairer than that," said Mère Suzanne, twirling the wool off her distaff. "Come, Colette, set on the supper, since we are not to wait for Christophe. Marcelline ! what art thou reading, child, by this bad light ?—a montagnard ? "

"No," said Marcelline, rousing up ; "the tract Bertrand gave me. It is very interesting."

"Ah, Bertrand has done for himself now," said Fabien. "They've got him by the leg, and they won't let him go in a hurry, it's my notion."

"Why not ? " said Marcelline ; "he has not confessed anything."

"I did not know he had anything to confess," said Colette. "You know, he *could* not have broken the cross."

"Say you so, say you so ? " repeated Fabien, in a drawling, provoking kind of sing-song. "If he didn't, he knows who did."

"How do you know ? "

"I'm sure."

"Well, you are very oracular," said Colette

impatiently; "if you know so much, you had better take heed lest your turn to be arrested come next."

"Ah, my father is more in danger than I. I don't care for these things."

After this, conversation flagged a good deal; and Fabien, disappointed, wondered how it was he could not make people merry and pleasant as Victor could. He thought it was their fault, not his, and that they were resolved to be dull and hard to please, which made him feel resentful. But still, he saw no reason why he should go till Christophe returned, and therefore kept sitting, sometimes telling a story with very little point, sometimes trying to get up a flirtation with Colette, and sometimes in dead silence, in spite of two or three yawns very little concealed by his provoking mistress. At length, Mère Suzanne, hearing the cathedral clock strike an hour later than she was accustomed to be awake, said, "Truly, I think you had now best go home, my good lad, and tell Christophe we are sitting up for him."

Fabien, thus dismissed by the only person to whom he had been much indebted for cordiality,

took up his cap and departed, after a fruitless attempt to draw Colette out to the parapet to admire the stars. She said she knew he did not care for them ; and if *he* did, she did not ; which he was unable to controvert, and, therefore, he took his way home without making any astronomical observations.

Christophe returned very soon afterwards. He looked eager and flushed, but made very brief answers to the questions that were asked. He said Grégoire had had several friends to sup with him, good men, serious men, who had talked very profitably ; but that he was too sleepy to repeat what they had said, and did not know their names.

The next morning Colette went to market, leaving Michel in charge of Marcelline, who sat lace-making at the door, while he lay in the sun between sleeping and waking. On a stool beside her lay the little tract Bertrand had given her, opened in such a manner that she could read a sentence and then reflect on it while pursuing her work. She never, so to say, lost sight of Michel ; she attended to him, her book, and her lace-making ; but these three absorbed her so

completely that she took no note of anything else.

All at once a man's shadow fell across the door, and a man's substance intervened between her and the sun.

"What book is that?" said the man.

"A good book," said she, startled; and he stretched his arm across her, and took it up.

"A good book; ay, ay, so I see," said he, looking at the title; "can you tell me where I can get one exactly like it?"

"No, indeed I cannot."

"You bought it at the door, I suppose?"

"No, I did not; it was given me."

"By whom?"

"By—really, I don't know who you are who ask me these questions," cried Marcelline, with spirit, "nor do I know why I need answer them. Give it back to me; it is mine, not yours!" and she took it from his hand.

"You did not buy it, then?"

"Certainly not."

"Bah!"

And the inquisitive stranger walked away.

When Christophe returned to dinner, he was

again behind time; and said he had been gleaning the particulars of Bertrand's re-examination. It had turned upon his business in Le Puy, and the nature of his visits from house to house. An attempt had been made to prove that he sold forbidden books; but he would not criminate himself, nor could any one be found who would own to having bought a book of him. He had been remanded.

The little family now began to take keen interest in the affairs of this man, and to make common cause with him. Marcelline, with some excitement, related her morning's adventure; and Christophe pronounced her fortunate to have baffled her visitor, and escaped being carried before the consuls. Mère Suzanne looked very grave, and said, "Perhaps that may happen yet," which made Marcelline feel very uncomfortable. Christophe said, "Give me the book, aunt," and sat down and read it straight through, instead of returning to his work. Just as he reached the last word, he was surprised by his grandmother taking it from him with a pair of tongs, and thrusting it into the fiercest part of the fire.

“ Oh ! what is that for ? ” cried Marcelline hastily.

“ That *it* may blaze instead of *you*,” said Mère Suzanne oracularly. “ And now, my boy, return to your work.”





CHAPTER IX.

The Tire-Lire.

COLETTE had just heard Michel murmur the inarticulate sounds which she fondly called his prayers, and had resigned her charge to her grandmother, who was particularly fond of tending him, when Christophe entered and said, "Come, let you and I run down to Grégoire's to supper—they expect us, for I promised them."

Colette gladly complied, and they were soon running down the steep streets together, and mixing in the bustle of the lower town, which was now quite dark, save where a flambeau flared in front of a rich man's house, or an oil lamp shone in the window of a poor one.

Those were days when rogues and robbers had every advantage, and when street murders and robberies were not a few. As Christophe and Colette turned out of a precipitous street into a dark alley, they heard a woman scream, and

immediately afterwards a trembling figure, muffled in a cloak, rushed towards Colette, and caught her arm, pursued by two or three ruffians. Christophe gruffly cried out, "How now!" and some one coming just then, with a lantern, to the door of the house they were passing, threw its light on the pursuers, who, with a laugh and a muttered oath, turned off.

The woman in the cloak said hurriedly to Colette, "Let me keep near you. I am not going far."

"Pray do," said Colette, who fancied somehow that the stranger was of higher degree than herself. They did not walk together, but the new comer followed them close behind, and Colette, looking round, saw that a lad had joined her.

"Now, Colette," said Christophe to her, in an under-tone, "you must not be surprised at anything you see or hear to-night, nor must you tell about it afterwards; for we are upon honour."

"What can you mean?" said she, with astonishment.

"Hist!" whispered he, "here we are." Then turning to the female who had sought their

protection, "I am glad you have somebody to take care of you," said he, "for here we must part."

"No," said the stranger, in a soft and harmonious voice, "I am going in too."

Christophe gave her a hasty glance from head to foot. She was closely muffled, and her hood hid her face; but as she moved forward a little more into the light, Colette caught the momentary flash of some precious stone in her ear, crimson and brilliant as a ruby, which, indeed, it was. She had probably forgotten to lay aside her ear-rings in assuming her disguise.

Christophe said not a word, but pushed through the narrow, close passage, and opened the door of the kitchen occupied by Grégoire and his family. The house, of which he rented the ground-floor, was in a close and ill-ventilated part of the town, and struck Colette as vastly inferior to her grandmother's airy habitation. This was only a passing thought, for the next instant, to her great surprise, she found herself in a room lighted by the yellow flare of a couple of common oil-lamps, and full of people kneeling on the stone floor, while a man prayed. She started violently, but at the same moment the glowing eyes of Victor

Souvestre were raised from the hands which had covered them, and he silently made room for her to kneel beside him. She obeyed, with a heart beating too quickly to enable her to take more than an outward part in the service for some minutes ; and when she recovered herself a little, she stole stealthy glances around her to form some idea of the company. The man who was praying looked as if he had fared on water and water-cresses all his life ; he was meagre and attenuated to the last degree ; with dark, hollow eyes, a parchment skin, and a voice that sank into the heart. He was praying fervently for Bertrand's release, and afterwards his petitions were for the welfare of Christ's afflicted church upon earth. Colette's furtive glances only rested on bent heads and hidden faces ; but when she looked to her left side, where she expected to find her brother kneeling, she saw, not Christophe, but the young woman in the cloak. The atmosphere of the room was oppressive to any one fresh from the keen outer air, and the stranger was silently loosening her mantle. Colette whispered, "Are you faint?" "A little," she replied, in an equally low whisper, "but I shall be better pre-

sently ;—take no notice.” And, while answering, she turned towards Colette one of the loveliest faces imaginable, pear-shaped, delicately tinted with the purest hues of the blush-rose and lily, full of soul and mind, and with that indescribable air of refinement which is seldom possessed except by those who unite high descent with cultivated education. Colette, startled, looked again, but the face was turned away, and the form immovable. The conclusion of the prayer was responded to by a general Amen, so hushed yet so emphatic that it made the heart thrill. All arose, and were quietly resuming their seats on benches placed against the walls, when Grégoire hastily exclaimed “ Bertrand ! ” and lo ! Bertrand himself stood among them. Instantly a dozen hands were stretched to seize his, or laid on his shoulder : it seemed such a direct answer to prayer, that women wept, and men’s hearts burned within them. Colette and Christophe took no part in the demonstration, nor did Victor. Though interested in Bertrand, he was evidently far better known, and of greater importance to many others than to them. As the men closed round him and hid him awhile from their view, Colette,

glancing round, caught Fabien exchanging a stealthy look of irony with a man she knew by sight, called Jacques Guitard. It did not improve her opinion of Fabien ; for Jacques, though a wealthy tradesman, had Mère Suzanne's bad word whenever she named him, and had, once on a time, been refused by Marcelline.

There seemed a general impression that prayer should now be followed by thanksgiving. It was brief but hearty. There was then an attempt on the part of the leader to give out a hymn ; but Grégoire interposed with, " Not safe—not safe,"—which was echoed by one or two others. The preacher looked around, hardly inclined to yield, and actually proceeded to read out one of Clement Marot's hymns, and then to set the tune, which was taken up by several full-toned voices ; but a shower of stones against the wooden shutter caused the singers to stop ; and Victor, who had stolen unobserved from the room, returned and whispered a few words of warning to Grégoire, who said, " My friends, we are watched, and may be molested—it will be best for you to disperse quietly through the door at the back of the house."

A little confusion arose on this announcement ; some were for facing the danger, others for awaiting it ; but as they clearly had no right to compromise their host without his sanction, the meeting broke up somewhat abruptly, and they issued through the back-entrance in small groups ; Colette, Christophe, and Victor among the last.

“ Where is Bertrand ? ” said Christophe, looking round. “ Does he not return with you ? ”

“ Hush,” said Victor, “ he remains behind to talk matters over with Grégoire and the minister. I am as well pleased it should be so, for the streets are disturbed to-night, and you and I shall not be too many to take care of your sister.”

Saying which, he offered his arm to Colette, who shyly took it, though her brother was close to her on the other side.

“ That girl in the cloak is still behind us,” whispered Christophe to her.

“ All the better ; it is a pleasure to feel she can trust us,” returned Colette, equally softly. “ She is quite a lady, I believe ; and oh, Christophe ! she has such a pretty face ! ”

“ Has she ? ” said he, looking over his shoulder, somewhat eagerly. “ But she keeps it muffled so,

I can't see it—nor anything but the shining of a bit of red glass."

"Hush! I think it is a real ruby."

"Fie! a real ruby indeed! What should bring a real lady to such a house as Grégoire's?"

"The love of God," said Victor abruptly. "For my part," in a whisper only audible to Colette, "I want no prettier face than one closer at hand."

This made Colette still more shy; and she would have stolen her hand from his arm, but he kept it fast.

"I wish the moon would shine out a bit," said Christophe. "Here I am walking clean into the gutter."

"Then walk clean out of it, if you can!" said Victor, laughing.

"Ah, you're a clever fellow. I believe it will be best to drop behind you, for we can't walk three abreast."

"Much the best plan," said Victor. "'Tis *you* who are the clever fellow, to have thought of it.—And here we come to plenty of light.—What mischief is afoot now?"

In turning into one of the main streets, which

they were obliged to cross, they found themselves in the midst of noise, uproar, and a blaze of torchlight. A mock shrine had been dressed up with tapers round a black doll intended to personate the Lady of Le Puy, and some of the very lowest of the populace, self-constituted its priests, were bawling out a hymn that had much more profanity than devotion in it; at the same time shaking a money-box they called a *tire-lire*, and exacting contributions of small coin to it from all passers.

“We had better turn back,” said Victor hastily, and drawing Colette closer to him as he spoke; but, at the same moment, she was rudely seized by one of the money-takers, and pulled forward by the wrist, to do homage and pay tribute.

“Take that!” cried Victor, indignantly striking him in the face with his fist. Then, putting his arm round Colette, he, by sheer strength and presence of mind, got her through the angry mob, and bore her, breathless and terrified, into an alley across the street, in the comparative gloom of which they soon found themselves in safety.

Christophe had been on the point of following

them, when a stifled cry made him turn round to the rescue of the young person behind. Some one had snatched at her ear-rings, her boy-attendant had put up his slight arm, which would have been struck down the next moment, but for Christophe's interposing his own like a bar of iron, and constituting himself the champion.

"Tribute to Our Lady!" cried the *tire-lire* bearer, rattling his box, and then offensively pressing it on her.

"Alas, I have no money," said she hurriedly. — "Claude, have you?"

"Not a *sou*, Mademoiselle," whispered the lad. "What miserable ill-luck!"

"Stay, I have some copper pieces," said Christophe, "though 'tis a rank imposition.—No! my pocket has been rifled!"

"Heretics! heretics!" cried several unruly voices; and the cry was caught up by others.

"These will do," said a man, making a snatch at an ear-ring.

She instinctively cried out as her ear was hurt by the jewel being dragged from it; and Christophe, exclaiming, "Rascal!" roughly pushed him back.

“ Don’t strike him,” cried the lady hurriedly.
“ Wait a moment, I have a ring.”

“ You may be traced by it, lady,” whispered Christophe, “ which perhaps you might not like.”

“ Traced ! oh, no ! ” and she quickly drew on her glove.

“ That white hand belongs to a lady ! ” cried her persecutor. “ Come ; your ring, your ring ! ”

“ We may yet make a dash for it,” whispered Christophe. “ Can you trust me ? ”

“ I can—I do ! ”

“ Now then ”—and he was going to rush through the crowd with her, when he was hustled, collared, and kept back. Glowing with anger, he threw one arm round his companion, and was preparing to make a desperate assault with the other, when the galloping of horses’ feet along the lava pavement was heard swiftly approaching, followed by a cry among the people of “ The Bishop ! the Bishop ! ”

The young lady now began to tremble so violently that Christophe feared she would fall to the earth.

“ Do not let him see me,” whispered she.

“ He cannot,” returned Christophe, “ your

face is completely hidden." And he drew her back a little, that she might lean against the wall of a house. It was one of those old shops with stone arched fronts in place of windows, still to be seen in Le Puy; especially in the Rue Pannessac.

Meanwhile, the Bishop was riding up, with his train; and as the yellow torchlight fell full on him, they saw him distinctly, themselves unseen.

He was in the very prime and flower of life, with a face like an angel's: that is, full of intellect and sweetness, save when occasionally marred by the prevalence of haughty and intolerant feeling. His deep, azure-blue eye shone under a brow white as marble, and fit for a Grecian sculptor to have moulded: he had a straight nose, beautifully cut mouth and chin, and a complexion, say the old chroniclers, like lilies and roses.

This ecclesiastical Adonis, for such he is really portrayed in history, bestrode a richly-caparisoned mule, which he guided more like a warrior than a priest; and he gaily chatted with a martial-looking young horseman at his side, who was as brown as he himself was blonde. The attendants

of both, mingled together, with plumes, gold fringes, and jingling spurs, brought up the rear of the procession, which, with the rabble rout already assembled, nearly choked up the steep old street, and made up as pretty and characteristic a moving picture as a lover of the mediæval school would desire to see.

“What mummary is this?” said the Bishop, surveying the mock shrine with a frown. “I exceedingly dislike these profanities, and shall inquire into their originators, with a view to putting them down.”

This was said to his noble companion, but in a loud, authoritative, and displeased voice that was meant for all. Instantly a hush succeeded: one of the money-box bearers, who had had the effrontery to intend suing the Bishop for a contribution, slunk out of sight; and as soon as the train had passed, the crowd began to fall off.

“Now then is our time,” said Christophe to his companion, before the street had much cleared; and he safely conducted her across it into one which was comparatively quiet.

“Brave young man, how shall I thank you?”

said she gratefully; "you have extricated me from a situation of the utmost peril, incurred by my own imprudence. Will you accept this ring, of which I was so nearly robbed?"

"My service requires no reward," replied Christophe, gently putting it back. "Shall I not see you home? The streets are not yet safe."

"I have hardly any fears now—and I do not wish, as you may suppose, to be traced. And yet,—I owe to you so much already, why should I not trust you altogether?"

"You *may*."

"Perhaps, some day I may have it in my power to be serviceable to you or your—was she your wife or sister?"

"My sister."

"What is she?"

"A lace-maker."

"Ah!—And can *she* be trusted?"

"I am certain of it."

"Tell me her name and address."

He gave both.

"Thanks.—Just see me across the square, and I will bid you farewell."

He did so, in surprise and in silence. The

moon was now shining over their heads, and, as she turned to bid him good night, he saw her face distinctly. She saw that he did.

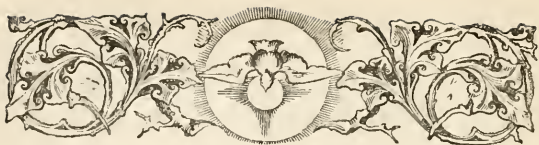
“ You will know me again,” said she, with rather an unsteady voice. “ Well,—at all events, you will not betray me.”

“ Never.”

“ Thank you,—from my heart ! Farewell ! ”

And she was gone the next moment, followed by her page. He had a great mind, a very great mind, to follow her ; but, after a moment’s thought, a greater mind to do no such thing ; and, turning about, he hastily made his way homewards, thinking over all that had happened.





CHAPTER X.

Brother and Sister.

MEANWHILE, Magdeleine de St. Nectaire, for such was her name, pursued her way without molestation, till her page, stepping before her, unlocked a small postern which admitted her into a cloister adjoining the offices behind the Bishop's palace; which it connected with a separate but contiguous mansion. There were strong smells of roast meat and charcoal fires, together with the murmur of many distant voices; but the private passage through which they pursued their way, had no access but such as the boy had already secured; and Magdeleine safely ascended a narrow stair, and opened a small door covered with the tapestry which hung the walls of her sleeping-chamber.

It was a very lofty old room, with one or two deep recesses, and an elaborately-carved oaken chimney-piece reaching to the ceiling; in the

centre of which, a Holy Family was painted in the mediæval style on the panel. A wood fire smouldered on the hearth ; beside it stood an exceedingly heavy carved chair, which owed whatever ease was to be found in it to the soft down cushions. A bed with towering canopy festooned with dark-green stamped velvet, with linings of pale rose-colour silk, occupied the most prominent place, and, with its snowy coverlet and lace-trimmed pillows, looked fit for the repose of a sleeping beauty. The toilette and mirror, draped with delicate lace, stood on a little daïs of two steps which filled the deep recess of the projecting window ; and a lighted lamp hung from the centre of the ceiling over a small table covered with crimson, on which were various books, and a casket inlaid with brass.

Magdeleine seated herself, panting, in the arm-chair beside the fire ; and having recovered her breath, she took off and put away her heavy cloak and the coarse stuff dress beneath it ; then putting on a flowing white wrapper, she unlocked her bedroom-door and looked into the ante-chamber. She was satisfied on seeing an old woman slumbering beside the fire ; for she had allowed her

two principal female attendants to go to the wedding-supper of a fellow-servant, and she felt assured that the old nurse, who believed her to have gone to bed early with a headache, had had nothing to awaken her suspicions. Therefore she locked herself in again, made up the fire, and was preparing to brood over it and collect her scattered thoughts, when a tap at the secret door made her start like a guilty thing.

It was Claude the page, with wine and cakes on a small salver.

“ I thought Mademoiselle must need some refreshment,” said he, in a hushed tone, looking up at her with respect and affection.

“ Thank you, thank you,” said she, taking the salver from him ; “ I had not thought of it, but it will be very acceptable. And now get your own supper and go to bed as fast as you can. I know I can trust you.”

“ Yes, Mademoiselle ; but what an awful risk you ran to-night ! ”

“ I must be more cautious in future. Have Melanie and Victoire returned yet ? ”

“ No, Mademoiselle ; but his Grace sent for me to inquire for you, and I said you had retired

for the night. That was better than saying you had gone to bed early with a bad headache, was it not?"

"Truth is always better than falsehood or subterfuge. How surprised Melanie would have been to see her uncle to-night!"

"She would indeed, Mademoiselle! I think she would sooner have been with us than at Lolotte's wedding. The Seigneur Guy is supping with his Grace, Mademoiselle."

"That is no concern of mine, Claude—good night."

When she had dropped the tapestry and resumed her seat by the fire, she sat a long time in profound meditation; then arose, took a small key from her bosom, unlocked a casket, drew from it a small thick brazen-clasped volume, and read in it attentively for about an hour. After another ruminating fit, she replaced the book, knelt at the *prie-dieu* beside her bed, prayed fervently, passionately, imploringly, and then went to bed.

Towards noon the following day, Claude informed his lady that the Bishop desired to see her. She arose from her embroidery, and met him half

way down the saloon in which she had been passing the morning.

Two nobler, more graceful, more dignified young persons could scarcely have been found in France than the brother and sister who then greeted one another. He was richly but simply dressed ; she wore the modest, becoming attire in which Catherine de Medicis is represented, as a young and blooming woman, in the *Mémoires de Condé*. Her dress, which would have been too close-fitting and long-waisted for any less perfect shape, was of violet satin, and closed from the throat to the stomacher-point by ten or twelve small agraffes of amethyst and pearl. The sleeves were finished at the wrist by small lace ruffles ; the skirt was long and ample ; the throat enclosed by a small lace ruff, or rather frill ; the glossy, luxuriant, pale brown hair, woven into innumerable small braids, and intermingled with strings of pearls, was surmounted, but scarcely covered, by what is now known as a Mary Stuart cap ; and from it descended a long and full veil of the most transparent fabric, over a velvet mantle a shade darker than the dress, which had wide sleeves and hung loose from the shoulders.

“ I regret, my sister,” said the Bishop, as soon as they were seated, “ that you were so seriously indisposed last night.”

“ Do not name it,” said she, slightly blushing, “ it was nothing. I am now quite well.”

He looked at her with a little anxiety, for he loved her very dearly ; but, as there was nothing in her appearance to contradict what she said of herself, he accepted it for the truth.

“ Your health was not forgotten among us,” said he. “ A dozen young chevaliers drank to it with enthusiasm ; nor did I refuse to pledge them, though, as you know, I touch not wine save to grace my guests.”

“ You kept it up late, my brother. Even in this my distant quarter, I heard the sound of festivity.”

“ Too late to please me, indeed, Magdeleine. I was glad at length to have it in my power to say I must attend a midnight mass.”

“ Late at feast and late at prayers, too ! ” said Magdeleine, smiling. “ I was better off, sleeping in my nest.”

“ And yet, had it not been for your indisposition, I should have prayed you to attend the

mass ; for there is need, just now, for demonstrative piety, as well as for much humiliation and expiation."

"Do you mean on account of the broken crucifix?"

"Certainly; even were it not a sign of the spirit of the times."

"What do you call the spirit of the times, brother?"

"Can you ask? Heresy: anarchy."

"What if it should only be a movement which, like a summer storm, shall disperse what is noxious and leave us a clearer, purer atmosphere?"

"Ah, my dear Magdeleine, this is only one of the pernicious notions you imbibed from your Valdensian nurse."

"Nay, my brother, I cannot bear to hear you speak of her so harshly. She had the love of Christ in her, and was unto me as a mother."

"Her fidelity and tenderness I have never disputed. The poor woman had a zeal, but not according to knowledge."

"Why, she had the whole New Testament by heart!"

“A great proof of her memory, but not of her understanding. *You* might have the whole of Aristotle by heart, and yet not understand him.”

“Do *you*?” said she playfully.

“I forgot I was speaking to a learned lady,” said the Bishop, immediately adopting a lighter tone. “*I* understand him? Not I, my dear Magdeleine, I promise you; I doubt if he always understood himself. What have you in hand here? Some votive offering for our Lady?”

“No.”

“The motto is pretty, at any rate—if not very new—‘*Via crucis, via lucis.*’ Yes, that is the good old path.”

“The path of *light*, you see, brother. They who bear the cross must not be blindfolded.”

“They have the inner light, my sister, to guide them.”

“Ah, I wish I had an inner light,” said Magdeleine wistfully: “one that would always shine on my path.”

“They that bear the cross have the light,” said the Bishop. “Only those who hate the light walk in darkness.”

“ How true ! Yet how differently we understand it ! ”

“ Because you choose to bewilder that little head of yours with matters no woman can or need understand. Have you confessed lately ? ”

“ I never confess to you,” she answered quickly.

“ Certainly not ; but Père Jérôme tells me you have not confessed for some time.”

“ I wish Père Jérôme would confess his own sins instead of mine ! ” cried Magdeleine hotly.

Her brother smiled, and said, “ The priest must have no reserves from his bishop.”

“ A very good reason for my not being fond of confessing my sins to a priest ! Ah, brother ! how much better to confess them to God ! ”

“ We may do that too.”

“ But why the other ? ”

“ You who profess such a fondness for Scripture should remember the text, ‘ Confess your sins one to another.’ ”

“ But Père Jérôme does not confess his sins to me ! There is nothing mutual in our confession. I think that text simply directs me, for instance, if I have injured or offended you, ingenuously to admit it and express contrition for it.”

“ ‘ *You think,* ’ ” repeated the Bishop, with quiet irony. “ Well, Magdeleine, instead of injuring me, there is something you may do which will please me very much, and I hope you will do it.”

“ What is it, dear brother ? ”

“ I have agreed with the Chapter to have a solemn and public expiatory procession, with all the pomp imaginable, and I expect you to take a prominent part in it.”

“ Ah !—” said she, with a look and tone of extreme aversion.

“ What do you mean ? ” said the Bishop, with darkening brow. “ Do you refuse compliance ? ”

“ It will be so very offensive to me.”

“ Magdeleine ! It is you whose words and sentiments are offensive in the eye of God ! What am I to think ? I do not desire to think amiss. As your affectionate brother, I entreat you to comply.”

“ In anything but this ! ”

“ As your spiritual superior, I command you ! ”

She coloured crimson, and a rebellious, defiant look for a moment animated every feature. She breathed quickly, without speaking. The Bishop’s eye remained fastened on her.

“This cannot go on,” said she, at last, pressing both her hands upon her heart. “If you know all I confessed to Père Jérôme, you know all I think and feel.”

“*I know all!*—and I say, that if you ever again steal from home, under cover of the night, with a mere child for your companion, to hold private meetings with men who have no character to lose, your name will be blasted for ever!”

She started from head to foot, and her head seemed to spin round, for he knew or appeared to know much more than she had supposed. A shower of black specks seemed falling before her eyes, and she was on the verge of fainting.

“Yes,” said he, in a melting, penetrating voice, as he marked the carnation hue of her cheek subside into the lily,—and, as he spoke, he rested his arm on the back of her chair, checking the brotherly impulse to support and caress her,—“Yes, I know all; and it is to no good to say that the meeting was held at the house of your imbecile old nurse,—for it was indecorous in the extreme, and involved, or might have involved, my name in the disgrace of your own.”

Then, he *did not* know all!—did not know of

the imprudence of last night ! That visit to the nurse's had been an old offence, that had sunk into comparative insignificance. She re-collected her senses.

“ Let us say no more of this, now,” said he soothingly. “ Indeed, you are incapable of replying to me at this moment, and the shock should not have been so sudden had I known it would be so grievously felt. Magdeleine ! we love each other !—have loved one another from childhood. Do not, by reckless, perverse imprudence, part us asunder.”

Her spirits were shaken, and she covered her face with her hands and wept.

“ I shall leave you now,” said he tenderly ; “ for I have much to do and to think of ; but there is one whom I had for the time forgotten, who is anxious to see you on his return from Paris. Will you admit Guy de Miremont ? ”

A rosy-red blush coloured her lately pale cheeks : she hesitated.

“ No—yes—no.”

“ Second thoughts are best,” said the Bishop gaily, “ so I shall take no heed of the first and the third.”

“No indeed, brother, I think I would sooner not see him.”

“I shall send him, though,” said the Bishop rather mischievously, “and he will have the amusing and unexampled sight of Magdeleine de St. Nectaire in a flurry.”

“That he certainly will not,” said she, drawing herself up, and regaining her self-possession at once ; and the Bishop, smiling, withdrew.





CHAPTER XI.

News from Paris.

FROM the moment Guy de Miremont had been named, Magdeleine had experienced a revulsion of feeling, which had much less to do with heaven than earth. It flashed upon her all at once, how her stolen visits to the Lutheran meetings would appear in the eyes of the world, and she felt an exceedingly strong repugnance to their coming to the knowledge of her lover.

For such the young Seigneur de Miremont avowedly was ; and she loved him in return with all the strength of her affectionate heart. He was, truth to say, a cavalier that might have won many a woman's favour. Besides being handsome, graceful, and chivalrous, he was gifted with a good humour and cheerfulness which made it next to impossible not to like him far better than many a cleverer and more learned man. His laugh was gaiety itself ; whatever he did, he did

ardently, and he was neither conceited nor presuming. Though left his own master as soon as he reached man's estate, he had never been dissipated ; his love for Magdeleine was as fresh and pure as it was hearty ; and, at the present time, he was counted, and counted himself, a thorough, good catholic.

Of course this hero had some faults, though they were not very prominent. He could be a little hot, and he could occasionally change his purpose from one extreme to another, on what better logicians than himself thought insufficient grounds. He was always entirely convinced all was right when he did so, for nothing could have made him act insincerely for the sake of any expediency whatever.

Such was, in brief, the young noble who now entered Magdeleine's reception chamber and greeted her with a mixture of the old chivalresque homage and youthful ardour. She herself, if she could have helped blushing, would not have betrayed the slightest lack of self-possession.

" You are welcome, Seigneur Guy," said she ;
" I trust you have had a safe and pleasant journey from Paris ? "

“ Safe enough, since I am here, alive and well,” returned he lightly ; “ otherwise, the perils were many.”

“ Of what nature ? ”

“ Oh, the *routiers* were out in every quarter. The malcontents who are protected by Des Adrets are the terror of the land, burning, sacking, plundering, and slaying.”

“ Is there any truth in the report, think you, that the Terrible Baron intends to attack Le Puy ? ”

“ He would *like* to do so very well, I have no doubt ; but the attempt would be rather too hazardous. You are strong enough to defend your own treasures, enormous as they are : besides, you have powerful neighbours and allies—Polignac, St. Vidal.”

“ Oh, they are too slothful and selfish ! ”

“ They would not be, in case of real need—if *you* were in the city ! Ah, Magdeleine, every knight in France would make a crusade of it, if *you* were in danger ! ”

“ If our Lady of Le Puy were in danger, perhaps some of them would,” replied Magdeleine. “ They would sooner fight for a worm-eaten image than a living woman.”

Guy was checked for a moment by what struck him unpleasantly as a little profane in this speech.

“ Our Lady first, of course,” said he after a short pause, “ and ‘ the ladies ’ next. *Place à notre Dame et aux dames*. Talking of ladies, some of the court-ladies have been getting into an awkward predicament lately.”

“ How so ? ”

“ Why, I need not tell you that the new opinions—”

“ The *reformed* opinions.”

“—Are spreading with alarming rapidity, and even making their way among some of the upper ranks. Their promulgators are chiefly ministers from that hot-bed of heresy, Geneva, few in number, but distributing themselves over a large circuit ; here to-day and gone to-morrow, so that it is next to impossible to catch them ; for they are harboured and secreted among their proselytes with the most infatuated regardlessness of danger.”

“ *Noble* regardlessness, Seigneur Guy ! ”

“ They have even had the audacity to establish a meeting-house under the very nose of the Sorbonne, where they have assembled to devour a pig, in mockery of the paschal lamb.”

“ How *can* you believe such calumnies ? ”

“ At all events, they were disturbed in the act of eating *something*—there were long tables covered with white cloths ; and salvers and chalices.”

“ Questionless, they were celebrating the supper of our Lord.”

“ Ah, Magdeleine, you have a kind construction to put upon everything ! ” (Quite a fallacy, by the way, of Seigneur Guy’s.) “ But these people, I am afraid, were not so innocent as you, in your charity, think. Otherwise, why, instead of submitting to lawful authority, should they have barricaded themselves and made stout resistance ? However, they were taken into custody, after some bloodshed ; and among them, shame to relate ! were found three or four ladies of the court ! Figure to yourself the noble Azelais de St. Brice, the modest Clothilde De Launay in such a humiliating position ! ”

“ A dangerous position, but I do not know that I can call it a humiliating one.”

“ You do not ?—You do not take in the whole situation : Conceive the plebeian rank of their companions, the scanty proportion of their own

sex, the questionable purpose of their assembling, the publicity of their discovery, the dismay of their fathers and brothers, the horror and disgust of their lovers, the humiliating constructions of the court ! ”

“ Well, Seigneur Guy, all this was very terrible to a woman’s nature ; but may not such scenes have occurred among the early Christians ? Nay, we know it was so in the apostolic times. The Romans put the most terrible constructions on their meetings.”

“ You have ever been an admirer, I know, of *la perle des princesses*,” said Guy, smiling, “ ‘ La Marguélite des Marguérites.’ ”

“ Certainly I have always thought her a noble-hearted woman, rather timid and temporizing, perhaps, as she grew old.”

“ *She* had the reformed preachers to expound to her in her own private chamber, if I mistake not,” said Seigneur Guy, “ and was caught in the fact by the good King Henry, who gave her a box on the ear and said—‘ Madam, you seek to be wise over-much.’ ”

“ Very rude of him,” said Magdeleine.

Guy laughed, and said, “ We forgive a pretty

woman everything. King Francis forgave *her*, and screened her too."

"Well he might! He owed his liberation from captivity to her exertions."

"She was a devoted sister. And he was no bad brother. *Your* brother, fair Magdeleine, would probably have depended, in like manner, on your devotion to him, had he been in like case."

"Well he might! There is nothing I would not do for him!"

And she clasped her hands, and her eyes kindled as she spoke.

"Nothing? Well, I am glad to hear it," said Seigneur Guy, "for, sooth to say, there is a little thing he desired me to request you to do, which I do not see how you could well refuse."

"What is it?" said Magdeleine, brought down from her altitudes suddenly, and instinctively guessing what it was.

"Merely to take part in the expiatory procession to-morrow, which, of course, you would desire to do whether the Bishop made a point of it or not. Ah! what is it I see?" cried he, interrupting himself with a look and tone of terror; "your ear is frightfully mangled!"

“ My ear ?—Oh no ! ”

“ It bleeds ! ”

She put her handkerchief to it.

“ Ah, I remember. It was hurt when the ear-ring was removed.”

“ One of the ear-rings I thought myself so favoured by your accepting of me before I went to Paris ? Oh, what a wretch am I to have been instrumental in causing that precious ear to bleed ! ”

“ Pray do not take it to heart—it was no fault of yours.”

“ It must have been ! They must have been badly made ; and I, scoundrel ! overlooked it ! ”

“ Indeed they were made extremely well.”

“ I cannot be convinced of it. Do let me see them. Permit me to summon your woman.”

“ Do not trouble yourself, Monseigneur ; the ear is a very insensible member, and the pain is, I assure you, inconsiderable.”

“ Oh, but the wound is so frightful ! I can know no peace. The loss of blood must make you faint. That detestable ear-ring ! ”

“ It is of no consequence.”

“ Of no consequence ?—The ear-ring *I* gave

you !—Master Claude,” cried Guy, addressing the page who entered at this moment, “ will you oblige me by requesting Mademoiselle Magdeleine’s principal woman instantly to bring me the ruby ear-rings I was so unlucky as to give her before I went to Paris ? ”

Claude bowed with the most stolid look imaginable, while Magdeleine coloured violently.

“ What nonsense ! ” cried she hastily ; “ the fact is, the ear-ring wanted altering, and I sent it to be repaired.”

“ Ah !—but that should have been *my* care. It is a duty, a privilege—I must make it such.—What jeweller ? ”

“ I shall not tell you,” replied she, becoming excessively annoyed, both with him and herself.

“ Still here ? ” cried Seigneur Guy to the lingering page, who reluctantly departed ; muttering to himself, “ I sha’n’t go, though—’t will be no use.”

Just then, Mel̃anie, the first waiting-woman, entered through another door.

“ Permit me to request you, Mademoiselle Mel̃anie,” said Seigneur Guy, the moment he saw her, “ to fetch me your lady’s remaining

ear-ring — the ruby ear ring which is *not* broken.”

“ Broken, my lord ! ” said Melanie, with surprise ; “ my lady wore them yesterday—has worn them daily—they are on the toilette now ! ” And she hastily retired.

Guy looked quickly at Magdeleine, whose face betrayed extreme embarrassment. They were both silent.

“ I beg your pardon, my lord,” said Melanie, returning from the adjoining room with a small box in her hand ; “ I see here is only one.”

“ I told you as much,” said Magdeleine quickly to Guy. He took the box from the maid’s hand, and was turning with an apologetic look to Magdeleine, when a man-servant entered, carrying a small dirty object on a richly-chased waiter.

“ A young boy, Mademoiselle,” said he, “ has found *this*, trampled in the mud, in the Rue Pannessac, and, having recognised it for the jewel he has seen you wear in the cathedral, has brought it, hoping for a small reward.”

“ Let me see ! ” eagerly cried Guy, who, it may be observed, had attitudinized and studied the graces a little at the beginning of the interview ;

but who, since the blowing up of this storm in a saucer, had become exceedingly impassioned, and gesticulated like a veritable Frenchman.

“ Ah, what filth ! ” cried he, drawing back his hands in horror from the unlucky article, and then stooping forward to survey it minutely—“ Faugh ! ”—holding his nose and starting back—“ remove it, my good fellow, or the abominable effluvium will infallibly cause your lady to faint ; the whole apartment is tainted with it already. Go wash it six, twelve times, in different waters—*rose*-waters,—perfume it with musk and ambergris—lay it in scented cotton,—and then, if it does not knock you down, bring it hither ; but it will never avail for your lady’s use again till reset.—Stay—a guerdon, you said—give the urchin this coin.”

And he gave a gold piece to the man, who retired with a broad smile on his face.

The moment he was gone, Guy folded his arms, and throwing a tremendous expression into his eye, scrutinized his unfortunate lady-love, who was ravelling a piece of gold-thread very industriously.

“ The Rue Pannessac ! ” repeated he in a low,

hissing voice, speaking between his teeth—"Last night!—What! when the Rue Pannessac was the scene of that bacchanalian orgie! Magdeleine!—Speak!—what am I to think?"

"Think what you like, Guy," said she, bursting into tears, "for you torment me to death! Think anything you please, however unworthy, of me!"

"Unworthy! Think unworthily of *you*, Magdeleine? Sooner perish sun, moon, stars, and light! Your tears scald my heart! You have called me Guy for the first time."

"I would not, I can tell you, if I had had time to think about it."

"Don't recall it! Your woman said you had worn my ear-rings daily!—those ear-rings you would hardly accept, or own to be pretty, and affected to be so indifferent about! Precious, adorable Magdeleine!"

Doubtless, Guy would here have gone down upon his knees, but for the entrance of the Bishop, which recalled him to common sense directly. The Bishop looked troubled and pre-occupied; and was about to speak with seriousness, when, seeing his sister in tears and Guy

with flashing eyes and burning cheeks, he stopped short, and said—

“What! A lover’s quarrel?”

Now, Guy had so truly the spirit of a lover in him, that he would rather have been trampled to death than have involved the mistress of his affections in any embarrassment. He, therefore, cleared his brow directly, and said—

“Nothing whatever of the sort, my lord. The lady Magdeleine and I merely got upon too interesting a subject, and, her nature being so angelically sensitive, she was overcome more than I expected, and—and—”

“I am glad to hear it is nothing worse,” said the Bishop, smiling and taking her hand. “I believe I can pretty well guess the nature of the interesting subject, and I am glad an *éclaircissement* has taken place at last. You were sure enough of my consent beforehand. And now, to revert to a less interesting subject to both of you, Magdeleine takes part in the procession, of course?”

“Of course,” said Guy for her, seeing her quite unable to answer for herself. For Magdeleine was actually petrified, and covered with

confusion at her brother's having taken for granted something so utterly opposite to what had happened.

"All is well, then," said the Bishop, smiling affectionately on her; "and now, my dear Guy, if you can tear yourself away from Magdeleine for a few minutes, I shall be glad of your company."

"Certainly," said Guy, hastily raising Magdeleine's hand to his lips, and then accompanying him out of the chamber. Scarcely was the door closed, however, when he muttered, "Oh! my glove—" and leaving the Bishop to descend the stairs by himself, he was at Magdeleine's side the next instant. She raised her burning face from her hands, but did not look up.

"Magdeleine! the *éclaircissement* has taken place!—he is glad of it!" whispered Guy; and, unable to resist kissing the soft cheek his lips had approached so nearly, he did not wait to be chidden for it, but, the next instant, was hastening towards the Bishop's study.



CHAPTER XII.

The Incognita discovered.

THE expiatory procession took place with all the pomp and circumstance imaginable. Magdeleine de St. Nectaire took part in it; Colette was among the congregation; for, in spite of much conversation with Victor and Christophe in the interim, and an increasing disposition to adopt the reformed opinions as far as she could understand them, early habit and some degree of timidity prevented her from openly forsaking the established religion of the country. So she stood or knelt as others did; and having entered the cathedral with the lower orders, who closed the procession, she of course did not see those who with all the externals of rank and wealth took the lead in it. The service had commenced, when, through the long vista of figures, she saw Magdeleine standing near one of the

pillars in a long, transparent veil of black gauze, and knew her again.

“Christophe!” cried she eagerly, the next time she saw her brother, “I have discovered who is the beautiful lady who attended the meeting on Wednesday night. She is the Bishop’s sister!”

“Nonsense!” said Christophe.

“She is, I am certain; I saw her quite plainly, though we were so far apart.”

“The Bishop’s sister!” repeated Christophe, with scornful incredulity. “A likely thing, that she, the beauty of Le Puy and flower of all Languedoc, whose colours are worn at court tournaments by fifty young gallants, would demean herself by coming to such a place as Grégoire’s kitchen!”

“Remember what Victor said: ‘The love of Christ constrained her.’”

“But she is a staunch Catholic: the Bishop is one of the pillars of the Church, and she is his only sister!”

“Brothers and sisters don’t always think alike, do they, Christophe?” said Colette, laughing.

“Ah well, I am certain you are mistaken. You might easily be so at such a distance.”

“ Satisfy yourself, then, Christophe, by looking out for her the next time she rides out.”

“ I’m too busy a man to dangle about the Bishop’s gate, waiting a lady’s pleasure.”

“ You would know her again, I suppose ? ”

“ I fancy so,” said Christophe, swallowing a sigh, as he walked off. In fact, the poor young fellow had dwelt rather too much on his memory of this heroine of an hour, who was about as far out of his reach as the Fairy Queen was beyond the reach of Prince Arthur. She had, for the time, completely put him out of conceit with his old flame, Gabrielle, who appeared as vulgar and ordinary, in comparison, as the real Dulcinea del Toboso compared with the Dulcinea of Don Quixote’s imagination. And her influence, as far as it extended, had certainly inclined him to listen with more interest to the opinions of Victor concerning the religious party which she appeared to espouse at such peril to herself.

Therefore, in spite of the apparent indifference with which Christophe had declared himself too busy a man to look after her, he felt impelled to spend his first leisure half-hour in the way his sister had proposed.

The consequence was, that, hastening home, he drew her out to their old scene of confidential conference, the parapet, and, with something like dismay in his look, said in an under-tone, "Colette, you were right! She *is* the Bishop's sister, Mademoiselle de St. Nectaire."

"Ah, I knew I was right," said Colette. "How did you find it out?"

"By following your advice, and watching for her at the Bishop's gate. She rode forth with a gay bevy of knights and ladies; but there was a young noble close beside her, to whom report says she is going to be married immediately, the Seigneur Guy de Miremont."

And Christophe stifled a sigh.

"How one would like to be rich and noble!" cried he abruptly. "Why should not we be all alike? I suppose we *should* have been, if Eve had not eaten the apple."

"A hundred young cavaliers might be as rich and noble as the Seigneur Guy," said Colette, "but only one of them could win the lady Magdeleine."

"'Tis n't that," said Christophe, colouring to find his thought guessed. "But I've one piece

of advice to give you, Colette. It is most extraordinary that the sister of a Bishop, and the affianced bride of a staunch Catholic, should attend reformed meetings. It must be with great danger, and ought to be treated with great secrecy. So let you and I be mum."

"With all my heart," said Colette; "but it must be a secret known to many; to Grégoire, for instance."

"He has not a suspicion of it. I sounded him as to the unknown lady the very morning after the meeting, but he declared he had never seen her but twice before, and both times closely muffled. He supposed her to be the daughter of some rich citizen."

"And Gabrielle?"

"Oh, I have not named her to Gabrielle," said Christophe, with a shrug. "Nor indeed have I spoken two words with her since. Women don't like to hear each other praised."

And with this axiom, he broke off the conference.

Victor had of late improved his acquaintance with Colette to that degree that he was now habitually looked forward to in the evening, on

his return from work, and always received with smiles. He had generally plenty to say : in the first place, he always knew what was stirring in the town, and sometimes picked up news of distant parts ; secondly, he was now warmly attaching himself to the reformed opinions ; and though no great scholar, yet having a clear head and a strong desire to form an impartial judgment, he read with zeal and attention the various tracts he obtained from Bertrand, compared their contents diligently with a Bible which he had obtained as a loan from the same quarter, and talked over what he made out for himself with Marcelline and Colette, as they sat round the evening blaze. Christophe had very little genius for controversy ; but yet, like other people, he had his own bundle of opinions ; and these were very much at the mercy of Victor in sorting and turning over ; so that, after making rather a lame defence of this and that point, and being beaten out of it, he would frequently end by saying, “ I believe, my good fellow, you are in the right.” He had a decided taste for the secret prayer-meetings, that were attended with the zest of danger ; and would accompany Colette and Victor to them as often

as they liked, singing Clement Marot's hymns with all his might, and listening with round, wide-awake eyes to long sermons which he sometimes thought he understood. His partiality for Gabrielle had some influence in attaching him to her father's party. Gabrielle was a gay-hearted, thoughtless, and very pretty girl, early deprived of a mother's care, and with little zeal for polemics ; but she loved her father dearly enough to take it for granted that what he thought right could not be far wrong, and that what he thought wrong could not be quite right. Therefore she enjoyed and repeated many a pungent satire on the abuses of the Catholic Church, with a very easy conscience ; cleaned up her kitchen for the prayer-meetings with cheerful alacrity ; and, when they were held at some other house, thought it pleasant enough to tie on her hood, take her father's arm or Christophe's, and sally out into the fresh night air along the steep streets and tortuous alleys till they reached the rendezvous.

Farel, the ascetic-looking minister whom they had heard the first night, was usually the conductor of these secret meetings, but Melan de la Vigne had now appeared upon the scene ; and his

younger brother Bertrand, though his peculiar vocation lay in distributing tracts and sowing seed by the way-side, now and then conducted a prayer-meeting when no more regular leader was present.

These three men were watched. They knew they were so ; but, till they were " taken in the manner," the authorities affected to shut their eyes, and while they were thus left at large, they actively improved their opportunities, in some respects with an amazing degree of caution and address, in others with as remarkable a recklessness of personal danger, always largely relying, and thus far with reason, on the fidelity and co-operation of their adherents.

Bertrand found so much to do, both in the town and out of it, that he had seldom an hour's leisure, and was sometimes absent from Le Puy for weeks ; but, whenever opportunity presented itself, he spent an evening hour with Marcelline, whose sufferings prevented her from attending the meetings, and took the greatest pleasure in talking to her on the subjects which engrossed his time and his thoughts. Mère Suzanne occupied herself a great deal more in preventing

Michel from tumbling into the fire, or rolling off the parapet, than in listening to what Bertrand and Marcelline were saying ; but she saw that it interested them both, and secretly believed that perhaps a match might come of it, and that Bertrand, if he could reconcile himself to the thought of such a sickly wife, would have a fairer chance than had ever been the lot of Jacques Guitard.

Marcelline always felt a pang, when she saw Colette and Victor set off for one of their evening meetings, and she would wistfully look after the blithe young pair running down the shelving street. Sometimes tears would come into her eyes as she turned in doors ; and she never felt her bodily trials more painfully than when she knew or thought it probable that Bertrand would be present at the meeting. But when he came to her, the case was quite different ; she had then all the privileges of an invalid : his first care was for her ; he made circumstantial inquiries into her health, pitied and sometimes advised ; then told her of his journeyings to this or that town, village, or castle, where he had had reason to think he should find “ one in a city or two in a family ”

ready to listen to the word of truth and anon with joy receive it ; how in one quarter it fared like the good seed on stony places, where the recipient had no power or inclination to retain it beyond a short time ; in another, shared the fate of the seed dropped by the wayside ; in another, fell among thorns ; and in others, fell on good ground, and would, he ventured to hope, bring forth thirty, sixty, and perhaps a hundred-fold.

One dark evening, Marcelline had screened her lamp with her hand to let its light fall on the path till Colette and Victor had passed beyond its reach ; and she then closed the door and returned to her fire-side corner, where she sat down and mused rather sadly, while her mother, undressing Michel in the back room, could be heard singing, in a cracked but cheerful voice—

“ N'erount très frères,
N'erount très frères,
N'haut qu'une sor a marida.”

which is to say—

“ Three brothers there were,
Three brothers there were,
Who had but one sister to marry.”

Presently some one raised the latch ; and, to Marcelline's joy, she saw it was Bertrand.

“ I thought you were at the meeting,” said she.

“ Is there a meeting to-night ? ” said Bertrand.

“ No, I knew not of it, and have but just come in from the country, cold, tired, and hungry. I suppose Mère G  n  vieve has accompanied Victor, for the house is locked up.”

“ Hungry you shall not be long,” said Marcelline, rising to get him some supper ; “ and I hope you will soon be neither cold nor tired.”

“ Let me save you that trouble,” said he, taking the bread and cheese from her ; “ where is the meeting to-night ? ”

“ At Jacques Guitard's.”

“ Oh, then I shall not go. It is at the lower end of the town, and I am too wearied to climb this hill a second time to-night. Besides, I distrust Guitard, and meant to warn my brother and Farel against having any meetings at his house. They will find themselves caught in a trap some night.”

“ Where have you been ? ” said Marcelline.

“ I came last from the Ch  teau de Miremont, where in the absence of its orthodox young

master, his house-steward made me welcome to free access to his household. I sold many tracts among them, and we concluded with a prayer-meeting. I did not preach, for you know I am no ordained minister. I wish I were !”

“ How came you to be what you are ? I have often wished to know.”

“ I will tell you, Marcelline.”

“ Nay, nay, you shall finish your supper first.”

“ Well, I will ; and then my story shall be told by the fire-side.”

He hastily despatched his refreshment, musing deeply all the time ; and then, drawing his stool in front of the hearth, he thus spoke—

“ My father was a printer in Paris. My uncle was a bookseller in Meaux. The books my father printed were sold by my uncle, who was patronized by Briçonnet, the good Bishop. Many of these books were controversial, and such as, in the opinion of the Romanists, were heretical. The good Bishop did not consider them so ; he distributed them largely, and invited graduates who favoured the reformed opinions to his diocese. He often condescended to converse with my uncle on these opinions. My uncle, who was

childless, adopted my brother Melan, and intended to leave him his business. Meantime the Cordeliers denounced the Bishop as a fosterer of heretics: he was cited to appear before the parliament, and was dismissed with a fine and a gentle reprimand. Inferior offenders were less fortunate; several of them were branded with a hot iron at Meaux, and then banished. I, being then a lad on a visit to my uncle, was present with my brother Melan at the punishment of these people, and it made a deep impression on us both. One of these was a man named Le Clerc, who had often held me on his knee and given me sweetmeats: it turned me sick when I heard his forehead fizz beneath the red-hot iron; but his mother, of firmer mould than myself, embraced him with joy the next moment, exclaiming, ‘Christ and his marks for ever!’ These words sank into my heart deeper than the iron into his flesh. Melan and I, who slept together, talked over it at night, and felt the zeal of martyrs kindling in our young hearts. He aspired to be a reformed minister, but I said I would content myself with distributing books and recommending them. When my uncle heard Melan’s

wish, he combated it, out of natural fear of the consequences ; but finding that no prospects of danger appalled him, he finally ceded to his wishes, and sent him to Geneva. He then wished me to take his vacant place in the shop ; but my father was unwilling immediately to part with the only child under his roof ; and while the matter was pending, my uncle's patron, the good Bishop, was obliged to take refuge with the Queen of Navarre, who protected him till he died in his hundredth year.

“ My uncle then found himself losing his custom very much, and regarded with suspicion. This made him timid, and weighed on his spirits. We heard of the martyrdom of Le Clerc, who had been exiled to Metz. He had destroyed an image ; and, in punishment for it, his nose and right hand were cut off, a circlet of red-hot iron was fixed round his head, and finally he was burnt alive.

“ His mother could not stand this ; she lost her senses awhile, and then went into a rapid decline, and died. My uncle, who was an old friend of hers, often took me with him to see her. My ardour in the cause was only fanned

more and more by her words ; and at my earnest entreaty, my uncle allowed me to undertake the conveyance of prohibited books to cities where they were most in request, not however distributing them from house to house. I was on the point of being bound to him, when a disturbance arose in Meaux ; the mob broke into my uncle's shop, pillaged it, and burnt his books. This affected him so deeply, that he never held up his head again, but drooped and died. During the course of his illness, throughout which I nursed him, his business dwindled away, and at his death it was almost nothing. I then returned to my father, and worked in the printing-office five years. At the end of that time, a wider field of usefulness offered to me in the conveyance of books to various parts of France. My life became adventurous, perilous, but to me full of interest. Sometimes I crossed the path of my brother Melan, and we managed to assist one another. The deaths of my father and mother detained me for a time in Paris ; my mother, during her widowhood, could not bear to lose sight of me, and wished me to continue the business. But, on her death, I parted with it to

a friend, undertaking to get rid of as much of his stock yearly, by itinerating, as I could ; and I then took out a pedlar's licence ; finding it easiest to make my way under colour of having miscellaneous articles to dispose of. This, Marcelline, is the outline of my poor story."

Marcelline was going to reply, when Colette and Christophe hastily entered.

"Bertrand here?" cried Christophe; "your brother and Farel are under arrest! The meeting was interrupted and they were carried off!"

"Said I not so?" cried Bertrand; "I knew no good would accrue to them from trusting themselves to Jacques Guitard!"

"Guitard had nothing to do with it," rejoined Christophe, "at least nothing that I know of or can suppose."

"Ah, there is no good in that man," said Marcelline, "as those who rely on him are sure to find out soon or late. He has no real favour to the reformers in his heart; how should he have?"

"He would hardly mix himself up with them otherwise," said Christophe, "for they are not very safe company. Why should he have let them meet in his own house?"

“ Why, but to betray them ? ” returned Marcelline. “ How fortunate that *you*, Bertrand, were not there ! They would have arrested you with the others.”

“ Undoubtedly,” said Bertrand ; “ but I fear they will not escape as easily as I might have done. I must go and talk the matter over with Grégoire, and consider what steps we must take to-morrow.”

“ Surely, *you* had better escape while you can,” said Marcelline.

“ Escape ! and leave Melan in bonds ? ” said he, smiling. “ Why, if I had been at the other end of France, the first news of his imprisonment would have brought me to Le Puy ! ”

Marcelline felt ashamed of her suggestion, and silently saw him prepare to depart.

“ Farewell, my friends ! ” said he. “ We know not when we may meet again. One thing you can do for the prisoners of the Lord, that which the early church did without ceasing for Peter when he was in chains.”

And grasping the hand of each in turn, he quitted the house, accompanied by Christophe,

who said he would at least attend him as far as Grégoire's.

When they were gone, the aunt and niece sat down together, in silence and discomfort, for the cause was beginning to be very dear to them both, especially in the persons of certain of its members. Marcelline, remembering Bertrand's hint, applied herself to mental prayer. Then she asked Colette how the interruption had occurred; and related to her what Bertrand had told of his personal history. After talking it over a little while, they again relapsed into silence; till Colette suddenly said—

“ I wonder if the Bishop's sister could help him; help Melan de la Vigne, I mean! She must certainly be attached to the cause in secret, or she would not have incurred so much risk for it; and she owed some gratitude to Christophe for his protecting her. Might she not, if asked, be induced to intercede with the Bishop for the prisoners' release? ”

“ Possibly she might,” said Marcelline; “ but do *you* feel courage enough to ask her? ”

“ Yes, certainly,” said Colette.

“ Ah, dear Colette, it is difficult to get access

to rich people's houses. How could you manage to see her, think you?"

"Trust me to find some way," said Colette. "I will take a basket of lace on my arm, and request to see her principal waiting-woman, who is Monsieur Farel's niece. These are times that sharpen people's wits."





CHAPTER XIII.

Halting between two Opinions.

MAGDELEINE de St. Nectaire, surrounded by balls of gold and silver thread, and skeins of gay-coloured silks, and with various books bound in velvet and gold lying about her, one of which, “*Le Miroir d’une Ame Pêche-resse*,” was open before her,—looked very industrious, if industrious she were not. It must be confessed that the leaf had remained unturned nearly an hour ; and that the white satin scroll on her lap, which was doubtless destined to bear some dainty device, at present only displayed the single but very significant word “*Love*.”

Magdeleine was aroused from a train of thought by the entrance of her woman, Melanie, who told her that a young damsel was very desirous of being admitted to her, to show her some very curious lace ; she added, with a smile, that

she thought Mademoiselle might be glad of it for a special occasion.

Magdeleine started, and desired that the girl might be admitted. Accordingly, Colette, in her very best beaver hat with nodding plume and gay buckle, and a little basket on her arm, was speedily ushered in by Melanie. As soon as Colette saw Magdeleine, she blushed deeply with excitement and embarrassment; while Magdeleine looked at her attentively and with a little perplexity.

"I seem," said she, "to have seen your face, my good girl, somewhere before."

"Yes, Mademoiselle," said Colette, dropping her voice, "that is ———" and, fearful of telling in Melanie's presence, what her mistress might not wish her to hear, she hastily uncovered her basket, and began to produce its contents.

"This," said she, as she shook out a delicate veil, "is my aunt's work—she usually works for an employer, who takes off her hands as much or as little as she has to dispose of; but this veil was an idle amusement, she terms it, wrought to please her own fancy. Mademoiselle sees that the

border is enriched with pertinent devices, garlanded with roses and honeysuckles."

"Let me see—oh, I perceive," said Magdeleine. "What exquisite fancy! Stay, what is this? Here is an anvil, with a broken hammer beside it."

"The Truth is an anvil that has broken many hammers," said Colette.

"Is that the interpretation, maiden? What says this scroll? '*Gratiâ Dei, sum quod sum!*' Why, that is the Queen of Navarre's motto!"

"A scriptural one, though, Mademoiselle."

"Why do you bring this enigmatical veil to me? You should have taken it to some heroine among the reformers."

"I thought Mademoiselle had been one," said Colette softly.

"Why?" said Magdeleine, starting.

"In the first place, you *call* them reformers—not heretics."

"Poor, conscientious people! Well, I may. Why should we use evil names?"

"Also I have seen Mademoiselle among them," said Colette, still more softly.

"Ah!" said Magdeleine, suddenly blushing;

“did I kneel beside you at the meeting? You may go for the present, Melanie. Melanie is, however, a reformer herself,” said Magdeleine, as her attendant retired, “but,” in a lower voice, “no one but my page knows of my having attended that meeting.”

“*No one, Mademoiselle?*”

“I mean, no one in this palace; nor did I know that you had discovered me. But I have felt full of gratitude to your brother ever since, and have only desisted from seeking you out, to give you some proof of it, by the perils that would have attended it. You know not how I am placed. For my brother to know I had gone to that meeting, and gone *as I did*, would be for me to lose his good opinion for ever.”

“It was very dangerous, certainly,” said Colette.

“It was madness, unprotected as I was,” said Magdeleine with emotion. “So nearly detected too!”

After a moment's pause, she said, “You are right in supposing that I am favourable to the reformers. I have attended several of their prayer-meetings under the roof of my good

nurse, but I should not have gone to Grègoire's had there been time for deliberation. Farel is a kinsman of the famous Farel ; and though not equal to him in fame, has sufficiently the reputation of a good preacher to excite curiosity. Melanie is his niece ; she had gone to a wedding, when a message was sent to tell her that her uncle had unexpectedly arrived, and was going to preach at Grégoire's. Claude brought the message to me, and hearing me express my regret at Melanie's absence, since I could have accompanied her, he pressed me to consider him a sufficient guard, and I too hastily complied. I need not say how much I afterwards regretted it, nor how grateful I feel to your brother. Tell me, is there any way in which I can serve him ? ”

“ There is, indeed, Mademoiselle,” returned Colette earnestly ; “ for himself, he needs nothing ; but Monsieur Farel and Melan de la Vigne are in bonds, and the greatest kindness you could show him would be to prevail on my lord Bishop to release them.”

“ Certainly, you are resolved to put my gratitude to rather strong proof,” said Magdeleine gravely. “ This is a public affair, not a private

one, and I hardly know that I can undertake it. Besides, they will very possibly be set free after their examination, without any interference of mine."

Colette shook her head.

"They have long been watched for," said she, "and will not so easily escape."

"Well, if it prove so, will it not then be time enough for me to come forward?"

"Your pardon, lady,—no," said Colette. "If his Grace be pre-engaged to deal indulgently with the prisoners, he will give them a favourable hearing, and the consuls will be disposed to follow his lead; but let them once be committed, and the task will be much harder, perhaps impossible."

"It may be so," said Magdeleine uneasily, "for, just now, there is a strong feeling against the reformers; and the magistrates as well as the clergy will be glad to make one or two of them warnings to the rest. But do not you see this increases my difficulty and danger if I interpose?"

"Think of *their* danger, Mademoiselle," said Colette—"too probably the stake! Whereas, you, by a few words—"

“ ‘ A few words ’ is easily said,” observed Magdeleine, “ but they sometimes involve a good deal more than they express. How many people fall off from love and duty to one another, just because they have had ‘ *a few words* ! ’ ”

“ But these would not need to be quarrelsome words, lady,” pleaded Colette,—“ only compassionate, entreating words.”

“ They may lead to quarrelsome words, though, as you call them,” said Magdeleine. “ The Bishop will naturally ask *why* I entreat so earnestly.”

Colette was silenced. A tear dropped from her eye ; she began to fold up the veil.

“ I shall have that veil,” said Magdeleine. “ What is the price ?—So little ?—Oh ! you must take this.”

Colette drew back her hand when Magdeleine held out to her three times the price she had named. It seemed like compounding for leaving the prisoners to their fate ; and she did not like indirectly accepting a pecuniary acknowledgment of Christophe’s good offices, which he had himself refused at the time and on the spot.

Magdeleine saw and understood the feeling.

After a moment's silence, she rang a small silver bell ; and, on her page obeying the summons, she bade him request the Bishop to permit her to have speech of him for a few minutes at his earliest leisure.

“ His Grace has already gone forth, Mademoiselle,” replied Claude, “ and will not return till dinner.”

At the same instant the cheerful voice of Seigneur Guy was heard approaching, as he came along the corridor.

“ Ah, then you see 'tis too late,” said Magdeleine, hastily, to Colette. “ The opportunity I would have availed myself of is lost—I am very sorry ; but—and I'm sorry, too, you will not let me pay the just price for this veil ”—hastily folding it up and putting it aside, lest the Protestant mottoes should attract her lover's attention—“ but just now I am engaged, and cannot conveniently say any more to you. So that—you may go for the present,” very hurriedly, as Seigneur Guy drew nearer.

Colette coloured deeply, and taking up her little basket, curtsied in silence, and retired in great chagrin at the failure of her undertaking.

“How foolish is it,” thought she, as she sadly departed, “to build my hopes on the zeal of these grand ladies. How difficult it must be to cultivate the love of God in a palace! There is everything, it seems to me, to repress it—everything to delight the eye and estrange the heart. That young lady seemed full of piety when she knelt beside me in Grégoire’s kitchen; but now her thoughts are full of her gay wedding and her handsome lover—and no wonder!”

Had Seigneur Guy’s entrance immediately followed the sound of his voice, Magdeleine would have had no leisure for self-condemnation or regret; but as he happened to meet the Bishop’s falconer, who spoke to him about some jesses, she had a few minutes for thoughts of a very unsatisfactory nature. Thus her brow was slightly clouded when Guy entered.

“Who was that pretty peasant-girl whom I met on the stairs?” said he cheerfully.

“*Was* she pretty?” said Magdeleine, absently; “I scarcely noticed it.”

“Not in comparison with yourself, adorable Magdeleine,” said Guy; “merely a rosy country lass, looking more pensive than ordinary.”

“ She came here with lace to sell. Have you seen my brother this morning ? ”

“ I have but just quitted him. He was on his way to the chapter-hall, to examine the men who were taken last night.”

“ Ah ! I would gladly have spoken with him first. He will let them off, I hope, Guy.”

“ There is very little chance of it, I think. On the contrary, they will probably be made an example of, as there was a fresh outrage committed last night.”

“ Ah ! how very unfortunate ! ” and her tears were ready to fall.

“ The oratory of the Place du Martouret was broken into, the crucifix broken, and the *ex voto* dragged through the streets. I understand there was quite a riot.”

“ But these poor men could have had no share in it, for they were locked up ! ”

“ They could have had no active part in the disturbance, but were probably its exciting causes ; and the Bishop is of opinion that nothing short of very condign punishment will answer, because their evil influence is plainly on the increase. For, note you, when the first outrage occurred, the

voice of the people was against it; but this time, the voice of the people is for it."

"*Vox populi vox Dei*," said Magdeleine. "Ah, no, in God there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

"Just what I was going to say," said Guy; "the people, you see, are for one thing to-day, and another to-morrow."

"Then, since they will be for something else to-morrow, why punish condignly their offence of to-day?"

"The *instigators* of their offence, rather," said Guy. "For this reason—that men like the prisoners are *not* swayed with every breath of popular opinion; they lead, instead of following it; and no matter that in their absence the people return to what they were, if we permit them to be present and keep them up to the mark."

"Put them forth from among us, then," said Magdeleine; "that will be enough."

"We *are* going to put them forth from among us," said he gravely.

"Ah! not that way;" and she began to shed tears.

"Sweet Magdeleine, your tears always go to

my heart! Fie! you are spoiling your white satin scroll and tarnishing your silver thread with them," said Guy sportively. "Come, let me see what dainty device you are embroidering—'Love!' Is this for me?"

"Ah, Guy, I can think of nothing but these poor, unfortunate men, just now."

"Do not consider them such. They will like being made martyrs of, and we shall like making martyrs of them; so both parties will be suited."

"Guy! how *can* you—"

"How can I what, dearest? It is plain matter of fact. They will revel in being burnt, and your divine compassion is thrown away."

"It is a grand thing, no doubt," said she with solemnity, "to die for the truth."

And her eye kindled with such fervour that her lover was awed into seriousness.

"Poor fellows!" said he, "if it *were* the truth that they hold, your compassion would truly, as I jestingly said, be thrown away. The worst is, that they will find out their miserable mistake when their doom in this world is consummated."

"And is *that* a reason for hurrying them out

of it?" cried Magdeleine. "Why, it appears to me the very climax of folly, as well as cruelty, to thrust a man out of a world in which he may yet be converted, because you think there is only misery without reprieve for him in the world to come! Guy, I *must* see my brother."

"He will have returned ere we have had our ride."

"I cannot ride this morning—my head aches—I cannot tell what to do;" and she arose and hurriedly paced the room.

"What if theirs be the truth?" said she, suddenly stopping short before her lover.

"What if it be not?" was his smiling reply.

She turned away impatiently, and he began to play with her lap-dog, when Claude, entering, said, "Mademoiselle, his Grace has returned."

"Already!" said she, changing colour. "Request him immediately to let me see him."

"There must," said she to Guy, "have been a very short examination. Either they are condemned or acquitted."

"They have not been acquitted, rely on it," said he.

"I cannot remain in suspense. You will

excuse me, I know. I am sure my brother will see me."

And, without waiting for her page's return, she threw on a light veil, left the Seigneur de Miremont rather abruptly, and hastened through the cloister towards the Bishop's private study.





CHAPTER XIV.

Intercession.

“**Y**OU here, my sister?” said the Bishop, turning towards her a somewhat ruffled look. “I had just desired Claude to pray you to dispense with my attention for a little while, and to say I would come to you on your return from your ride. No matter. You are perturbed, my dear Magdeleine,” said he, clearing his own brow, and leading her to a chair. “What is it?”

“Brother, I come to speak to you of these poor men.”

“I guessed as much. You have done humanely and like yourself. But their fate is sealed.”

“Ah, do not say so;” and her tears began to flow.

“I grieve to see you in distress, my dear sister; but the ends of justice must be fulfilled.”

“And not the ends of mercy?”

“Justice is sometimes the truest mercy, to the many, if not to the few.”

“And why should the few be excepted?”

“God alone can provide for individual as well as general cases. *We*, in aiming at individual advantage, can seldom help making the general advantage subserve it; and, if we can secure the general advantage, we must sometimes be content to let individuals suffer thereby. This is so constantly done and seen in the daily events of life, that I wonder, my dear Magdeleine, you should be surprised at it.”

“But I do not want to dispute general events, brother. I only want to speak to you about these poor men in particular. Here are they, guilty, you say, of heresy.”

“And of perverting others to heresy.”

“And, instead of reasoning with them, you burn them! What good will that do to their souls?”

“In the first place, they may abjure their heresy even yet, and thereby save soul and body; in the next place, they, if persistent in their sin, may, as notable warnings, intimidate and save the souls of others.”

“What has been proved against them?”

“Preaching heresy.”

“What is their sentence?”

“To be burnt.”

“Antoine, you used to be so merciful!”

He changed colour a little.

“You were literally quoted for compassion and tenderness of heart! Time was, you would not have killed a fly.”

“Nor would I now, if I could help it.”

“Ah, you could help killing these men. You could sway the chapter and the civil authorities.”

“I could not alter my own judgment; nor yet act in defiance of it.”

“Do you really believe you shall do God service by this deed?”

“I do.”

“Such a creed cannot be right,” said she, drawing a deep breath, and rising from her seat.

“A persecuting church *cannot* be the true church. I once believed implicitly whatever you bade me believe, and held you to be right in whatever you did; but I cannot do so now.”

“I am very sorry for it, Magdeleine, not only because your affection and trust are very dear to

me, but your salvation is more precious still. Listen to me, my sister; listen to that word of God of which you are so fond. Hear what St. Paul saith. ‘ This know also : that in the latter days, perilous times shall come ; for men shall be lovers of their own selves’ . . . ‘ traitors, heady, highminded,’—‘ having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof : *from such turn away* ; for of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins.’ ”

“ Brother, I am obliged to you for the application !—Certainly, I hope I am not one of those silly women, nor has any man of that sort crept into my house. In spite of your impressive reading of a passage you have garbled and abridged, (for I know it by heart,) I find it entirely inapplicable.”

“ I endure not to be told that I garble a passage,” said the Bishop, slightly frowning, “ though I certainly left out what was irrelevant. You called ours, just now, a persecuting church : criminals, and the partisans of criminals, *always* consider their condemners their persecutors ; but shall, therefore, a rogue never be branded, a murderer never be hanged, a heretic never be burnt ? ”

“ Brother, you will not find it answer. Men love cruelty, and *call* it justice.”

“ On both sides, Magdeleine ; it is not confined to our church. Calvin is as intolerant, as hard-hearted, as ill-tempered as any man that breathes. Ah, my sister, what evils result from ill-temper ! Were this a good-tempered world, the earth would be in peace ! Farewell now, I am expecting some persons who must not find you here. Go for the present, and I will come to you by and by.”

And reluctantly she was constrained to retire ; while the Bishop, as soon as he had closed the door upon her, sat down, covered his eyes with his hand, and sank into painful thought.

That night, a livid red light lit up the ancient streets of Le Puy, penetrated into the Bishop's palace, the prisoners' cell, the cathedral aisles, the rich citizen's chamber, the artisan's mean lodging, and was seen far and wide across the country, and in the mountain fastnesses of feudal chiefs, like a huge banner of destruction waving over a doomed city. Le Puy was in flames !

There had been a small prayer-meeting that evening at Génèvieve Souvestre's. It included

Bertrand, Victor, Grégoire, Christophe, Marceline, Colette, and Gabrielle. Bertrand interceded and wrestled in prayer for his brother and Farel, passionately, imploringly—every one was in tears. Suddenly the little room glared with crimson light ; they started to their feet, and hurried out to the little platform in front. It seemed at first as if they were girdled in with flames, as though there were going to be an *auto-da-fé* on a grand scale. Men looked grimly on one another, women clung fearfully to each other ; in a little while it was ascertained that their retreat was not absolutely cut off, but that whole streets of the lower town were in flames, and volumes of smoke rolled heavily up to the heights, almost suffocating those who inhabited them.

“ Peradventure, they who doom to the flames will perish in the flames ! ” said Grégoire, drawing Gabrielle to his heart. “ Praised be Heaven, my daughter, that thou art here in safety. Our few possessions may be destroyed, but we have little of this world’s gear to be careful for. I will go and look after it, however, and after Fabien, who, probably, is in the thick of the bustle.”

“ We will go, too,” cried Victor : “ we may

help to save the lives and properties of some poor people as humble as ourselves."

"My brother!" cried Bertrand. "He may perish miserably, smoked to death like a wasp in its nest."

"We will ascertain that first," said Christophe; "here is a good strong party of us, who may effect something if the wind set that way."

And, providing themselves with ropes, buckets, and staves, the men were soon hastening to the scene of danger, while the women either timidly stole towards it, or remained in the open air, watching it in groups or apart. Mère Suzanne and her neighbour Génèvieve were among the groups; Colette felt herself drawn nearer and nearer to the scene of action; everybody seemed out of doors; the roar of the flames was almost drowned in the uproar of voices; black forms, begrimed with smoke and soot, were discerned leaping from beam to beam among the burning houses; others were passing full or empty buckets from hand to hand, others rescuing children and infirm people, others saving furniture; some were bearing away sick or wounded persons in their arms or in litters, others weeping at the loss of

their property. "Who has done it?" "Who set the town on fire?" "The heretics," said many voices. "The heretics shall burn for it, themselves!" vengefully cried a man who had lost everything.

At one time, the fire seemed setting towards the Bishop's palace. Magdeleine, pale and trembling, was in her affianced husband's arms, prepared to escape with him the moment their safety should become endangered. The Bishop was in the scene of danger, directing, commanding encouraging with intrepid self-possession.

Colette knew not how time passed till she returned home, the fire still raging. She approached the little group at her grandmother's door, excited, overwrought, and eager to detail all she had seen. But, alas! no one was at leisure or inclined to listen to her; nor had she any thought for the past, the moment she saw what was before her. Marcelline, returning from watching the conflagration, had found Michel's bedroom full of smoke and smouldering fire, which, on her opening the door, burst into flame. Half blinded and suffocated, she groped her way to his bed and tried to rouse him; but,

stupified probably by the smoke, he slept even more heavily than usual ; and after vain efforts to make him move, the poor lame, suffering aunt took him in her arms and staggered forth under his weight, but not until her clothes had caught fire and burnt her terribly. All the men in the neighbourhood were absent ; but the women bestirred themselves with such zeal and success as to extinguish the fire in Michel's room, and then pity and tend poor Marcelline.

Colette was soon dressing her wounds and moistening them plentifully with her tears ; while Marcelline was suppressing the expression of her pain with a heroism that would have procured honour for a martyr at the stake. There was little sleep in their humble dwelling that night : Michel monopolized the whole of it. Mère Suzanne and Colette took it in turns to allay Marcelline's anguish by applying wet rags to her burns. Christophe did not return till daybreak : he said the fire had not endangered the prisoners, but that four or five hundred houses had been or were being destroyed ; there had been a great want of water, and great mismanagement of what was procured, till the Bishop appeared ; the

Bishop had seen to everything, had made everything go straight, had provided shelter for the infirm and homeless in his own palace and elsewhere, and had established order in every quarter. The reformers were whispering among themselves that the conflagration was a judgment on the Catholics for intending to burn the prisoners; but the Catholics were openly pronouncing it a judgment on the city for the sacrilege that had been committed, and vowing vengeance on its authors. Among the suspected persons were openly named Bertrand, Jacques Guitard, and Fabien: and some boldly pronounced them to have been the incendiaries. The city was full of tumults and rumours.

The next morning, placards were posted throughout Le Puy, offering a large reward for the discovery of the incendiaries, and also for the apprehension of Bertrand, and announcing that a solemn *auto-da-fé* would as soon as possible take place, to purge the town of its sins and propitiate offended Heaven, to be attended by all the ecclesiastical and civil dignitaries in full state and the entire population of all faithful people, and to include the burning of the two notorious

heretics now under sentence, as well as of every heretical and schismatical book in the city.

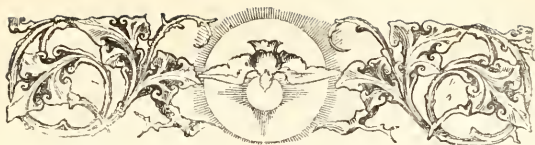
Colette was pre-occupied by commiseration for Marcelline, whose system had received so great a shock that it seemed very doubtful whether she would recover it. She was also deeply grateful to her for having rescued Michel, whom she considered her own peculiar charge, and whose life, valueless as it would have appeared to most uninterested persons, was made precious to her by that special provision of Providence which endears the crêtin to his family. Michel himself, neither grateful nor even conscious of the debt he owed his aunt, whom he merely beheld diverting much of Colette's attention from himself, passed the chief of his time either in sleeping before the fire, or, if the sunshine drew him out, hanging over the parapet, consuming great hunches of bread. Though a great eater, he usually preferred liquid to solid food : but, of late, his making away with slice after slice from the great household loaf, made his grandmother and sister suspect that, instead of flinging pebbles, he now flung away bread ; and often did Mère Suzanne shake her head and say, " Naughty boy ! naughty boy ! "

though she gave him another slice the next minute.

Colette so seldom left Marcelline that she knew little of what was going on in the town, except from Christophe, and from Gabrielle, who pitied Marcelline sincerely, and frequently looked in on her. From them it appeared that the town was in the greatest ferment and distress: the fire had occasioned immense loss of property and ruined many people outright, while a still greater number were homeless and thrown out of employment. The excitement against the reformers seemed to strengthen rather than abate, and it would appear that it was secretly fomented by ill-disposed persons. On the other hand, Colette learnt from Victor that the number of those who either were already reformers or disposed to be such was now being found by them among themselves to be far greater than had hitherto been supposed. Most of these kept their opinions secret, for fear of consequences; and, acting apart, were unaware of their general strength; but they were beginning to mass together, and would probably prove formidable, should any favourable opportunity occur. That would certainly not be just at present, when

the populace were almost frantic for blood, and the authorities were preparing for the most solemn and universal celebration of the *auto-da-fé*. Fabien, who had somehow fallen under suspicion of having a hand in the sacrilege, had got off and shrunk out of sight ; and Guitard had boldly faced out the charge, and was now serving in his shop, rather popular in consequence of having been active in extinguishing the fire, which, at one time, threatened his own premises. What had become of Bertrand, nobody could say ; probably he had left the city.





CHAPTER XV.

Mystery.

MAGDELEINE had exerted herself like a sister of mercy among the poor houseless and suffering people whom the Bishop had sheltered, to the immeasurable admiration and delight of her lover, who saw her, now tenderly dressing a wound, now shaking up a pillow, now feeding a sick person, now nursing a child—followed by wistful eyes and heartfelt blessings; or else, in her own apartment, with two or three rosy little foundlings on the floor, engaging the attentions usually reserved for her lapdogs; or setting aside her bridal finery to cut out, and direct her maids to make up, coarse garments for the destitute. “I cannot think of such things now; don’t bring them here,” she would say, when boxes of exquisite millinery were sent for her approval; and “O Guy!” she exclaimed, on opening a casket containing a necklace of pearls

and emeralds, which some distant relative had sent her as a present, "how much sooner would I have had the money these jewels cost to distribute among the poor!" He called her a saint, a ministering angel, to her face; and many others unfeignedly thought her so in their hearts; but, though not without her share of vanity and self-complacence under ordinary circumstances, she was acting under the much higher stimulant of the delight of doing good and relieving pain, which to a healthy, benevolent mind, makes all homage, praise, and flattery tame in comparison. She had likewise a thorn in her heart, regarding the reformers: she was one, yet had not courage to avow it in the face of danger. It was possible she might, without compromising herself, have sued successfully for mercy on the two men who had faced the peril she shrank from, had she done so in time: had they not been condemned, the town might not have been fired by some rash hand, and all the subsequent misery and irritation might have been spared. "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" "The beginning of strife is like the letting out of water,"—first a little runnel, then a stream, at length a torrent.

The Bishop took her exertions quite simply; as the illustration of the text, "Either make the tree good, and its fruit (will be) good, or the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt." Loving her more dearly than any created being, he in his heart delighted to see her shining in every feminine instance of Christian mercy; but he would not tarnish her good motives by the fostering of any less pure feeling, either by uttering or looking admiration or surprise. He paid her the higher compliment of telling her his own plans of benevolence, asking her opinion, and affording her his own, as if there were but one heart and mind between them.

Magdeleine deeply felt and valued this. Once, when he had spoken to her, with unusual detail and confidence, of his anxieties concerning the distress and excitement of the populace, tears suddenly rose to her eyes, and she exclaimed, "Those poor prisoners!"

"Three persons miserably perished during the conflagration," said the Bishop; "we think of them no more, except to relieve their families; yet their sufferings were as great as those of Farel and De la Vigne will be. They were unoffending

victims ; these men have broken the laws. The law will execute its sentence on them, whereas their own lawless adherents are suspected of having kindled the fire which destroyed those just persons and endangered hundreds of others."

Magdeleine stood mute, and he dropped her hand and turned away.

An hour afterwards, she stood beside him, pale as marble.

" Brother, if that unhappy Bertrand were to implore access to Melan de la Vigne, to bid him farewell, would you grant him a safe-conduct?"

" No, Magdeleine."

" Brother, if you and I were in like sad case, and *I* were to ask—"

He did not raise his head from his writing, but waved a negative.

" Or if *I* were the one under sentence, and *you* were to ask—"

He continued writing, as if not hearing her. A tear fell from over his shoulder on the paper.

He finished signing his name, and then held the paper up to her. " There!" said he, with emotion, " I was writing that order before you blotted it. You silly girl! You foolish Magde-

leine! You think every one a stock or a stone, except yourself. I know very well I am doing unwisely—am making a concession that may possibly be abused to the public disadvantage; but I likewise know that I am hereby giving you far more pleasure than if I gave you a diamond carcanet; and there is so much good in you, despite of your waywardness and wrong-headedness, that I love to please you! So now, take that safeguard, if you will, and send it by whom you will, to the man whom it concerns; and let him heed the conditions, for his liberty will not be respected one hour before or after the term named.”

She threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him, in spite of his putting her gently aside, and saying, “Fie! bishops should not be caressed, even by their sisters.”

However, Magdeleine did not look at all discountenanced, but quitted him with a springing, dancing kind of step, as blithe as a lark. For, after all, she was very young and very light-hearted.

She went gaily, then, through the various galleries and ante-chambers that divided her quarter

from her brother's, till she reached her own. Then she read the little missive, and became grave as she did so. After a few moments' thought, she rang for Melanie, and said, "Let me see him." Melanie looked wistfully at her before she retired, and the next instant brought in Bertrand.

He looked a much older man than he had done a week ago ; haggard, unshaven, careworn. He was ashy pale ; and when he tried to open his parched lips, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

"Here," said Magdeleine to him with the utmost compassion, "here is what you want."

"Is it possible !" said he, in a low voice ; and tears sprang forth.

"You are exhausted," said Magdeleine, weeping too. "Some wine, Melanie !" And she took the cup from her, and offered it him herself.

Bertrand could not speak, but attempted to put it aside. She pressed it on him ; he took it and tried to swallow, but his tears fell into the cup. "This is weakness," said he, apologetically ; and, mastering himself, he drank some of the wine with a strong effort.

“ You have been hunted down, and nearly spent with hunger and anxiety,” said Magdeleine.

“ Would that that were all,” said Bertrand. “ You know not, Mademoiselle, how we have loved one another ! Brought up together in boyhood, frequently sundered in after-life, yet pursuing the same cause, and animated by the same affection. And now—” Tears again sprang forth.

“ *You* could not, then, have held to your cause as he has done ? ” said Magdeleine.

“ God forbid I should fail to do so ! ” said Bertrand.

“ You do not aspire, however, to a martyr’s crown, or think it worthily purchased by a few hours of suffering ? ”

“ I think it would be cheaply purchased by *years* of suffering.”

“ Then, good Bertrand, look less sorrowfully on your beloved brother’s fate ; and bear in mind that he will soon have more cause to weep for you than you for him.”

“ I will, lady.”

“ How soon shall we *all* be before the eternal throne ! How soon this generation will have

passed away ! Then, how little will it signify to us how we groaned in these mortal bodies, when we shall wake up in our Saviour's likeness and be satisfied with it ! See, *I* am preaching to *you* ! Our positions are reversed. Now, be guided by me this once in all things, good Bertrand. Eat, drink, and sleep, that you may be enabled to impart strength and consolation to your brother, instead of requiring them from him. Rest and refresh yourself here, till the hour comes when you may see him : I will be your surety, both while you are here and on your way to him."

"Surely you must be an angel !" exclaimed Bertrand.

"Oh no ! Only a poor, unworthy sinner."

"Excellent lady !" cried he, with passionate gratitude. "There is only one thing left for me to ask you. Prayers such as yours must surely take the kingdom of heaven by force ;—would you but join with me in prayer for my unhappy brother ? "

"Willingly, gladly ! Melanie, see to the door."

"Let us pray."

Fervently did he pour out his supplications, and fervently did his two companions respond to

them. Suddenly, Magdeleine's quick ear caught the sound of Guy's approaching step ;—the next moment he would try the door ! She rose noiselessly, made a sign to Bertrand to cease, and went forth, just as Guy's hand was on the lock.

“ You cannot come in just now, Guy,” said she.

“ Why not ? ” said he, surprised.

“ Because I am engaged,” said she, leaving her room, and shutting the door behind her. “ Cannot you suppose it possible that I *may* now and then be engaged on my own affairs ? ”

“ Certainly ; only I heard a man's voice.”

“ Nonsense.”

“ *Did* not I ? ”

“ Does such a question require an answer ? ”

“ Why, yes ; because, if you admit one, why not another ? ”

“ Ah, you must learn to trust me.”

“ Of course, I do trust you already. However, just to gratify me, do oblige me, dearest Magdeleine ; did I hear a man's voice or not ? ”

“ Why, you foolish Guy, if I were to say you did not, would you believe me, when your own ears, you say, told you that you did ? ”

"I might have been mistaken."

"Oh, you admit that, do you? Well, perhaps you *were* mistaken."

"But I am almost sure I was not."

"Ah, do not yield to those impressions."

"The fact is, Magdeleine," and his brow slightly contracted, "your own conduct has convinced me I was right."

"You are growing serious now, Guy. Answer me in one word. Can you trust me?"

There was honesty and integrity in her tone and her look.

"I can!" said he, after regarding her earnestly.

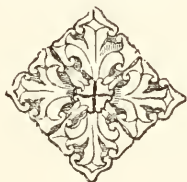
"Then do. There *is* some one in the room, or rather, there was, but no one beyond the rank of a *roturier*. Whether shoemaker, hair-dresser, or glover, is not needful for you to know."

"I do believe the fellow is a heretic psalm-singer," said Guy, so suddenly, and with such a comic look, that she coloured rosy-red, and could not help laughing.

"You know, I am not going to tell you," said she, "and you have promised you would never tell tales of me to my brother."

"Ah, well, I know I have knocked the right

nail on the head," said he merrily ; " so return, by all means, to your conventicle ! Though you were more heretical than Margu rite of Navarre, I am not a Henry d'Albret." And snatching her hand and kissing it, he quitted her with the most perfect good faith imaginable.





CHAPTER XVI.

A Festival.

THE bells of every church in Le Puy are ringing; the streets are thronged with expectant multitudes; windows are hung with tapestry and garlands; shops are closed, not in sign of mourning, but because their owners are among the throng: is it a wedding? the state-wedding of Magdeleine de St. Nectaire? Alas, no! there are two stakes in the great square. Twelve thousand persons, headed by the Bishop in his episcopal robes, the canons, the clergy, the censer-swingers, the angel-like little choristers in their white albs, the consuls in their scarlet gowns and chains, all the ecclesiastical and civic dignitaries, are defiling in solemn state through the city, to see two pale and squalid, but undismayed, prisoners burnt to ashes. Not a single "Jesu" is heard from the crowd; on the contrary, many maledictions and imprecations greet them as they

pass, with bare heads and feet, to martyrdom. Before nightfall, their ashes are scattered to the four winds—seed-corn of the church of Christ ! Their light affliction, which was but for a moment, is exchanged for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Mark you, reader, how that apostolic antithesis is balanced ? The *light* affliction against the *weight* of glory—a *moment* against *eternity*.

Then the city settled to disturbed rest, after an universal indistinct hum or rumour through its streets, like the low growls of a beast of prey sated with impure food, before it sinks into unwholesome sleep.

A spirit, looking down on that city, with power to pierce through material forms, might have seen here and there a cowed group, talking or holding their peace in sadness round some humble fire-side, or in the family sitting-room of some substantial citizen ; sundry solitary mourners, weeping in their own chambers, kneeling and praying by their own bedsides, one of them in the precincts of the Bishop's palace.

There were genuine mourners, too, beneath the roof of Mère Suzanne. That good woman had

persuaded herself, without the least foundation, that Bertrand and Marcelline were lovers : and Marcelline, after saying “ Nonsense, mother,” till she was tired, had involuntarily thought now and then how pleasant it would have been for them to join fates, had she been well and strong, and had Bertrand really cared for her. And the involuntary thought had led to voluntary musing, and the musing to an increase of interest and tenderness, which she kept hidden away, as she thought, in her own heart, but which did not entirely escape either her mother or her niece. Colette, indeed, feigned total unconsciousness of it ; and when Marcelline, after one of Mère Suzanne’s speeches, would jestingly say, “ How my mother does talk ! one would think her a young girl instead of an old woman,” Colette would laughingly rejoin—“ Indeed, aunt, I believe young girls are not so fond of match-making as old women. My grandmother seems to think you and I have only to say whom we like.”

But, since Marcelline’s burning and Bertrand’s disappearance, the subject had been too serious for jest. She never spoke of him or asked about him except with painful anxiety. “ Have you

heard anything of Bertrand?" was her first question whenever Christophe came in; and, on his answering in the negative, she smothered a sigh and folded her hands, ejaculating a mental prayer. Those poor hands could no longer thread a needle or ply her bobbins; it was with difficulty she could feed herself, and thus be just one degree less a charge to others than Michel.

But the martyrdoms had only acted as oil poured on fire. Instead of smothering the reformation, it blazed up stronger and brighter than before: reformed meetings were now privately held in the city and in the neighbouring villages, yet not so privately as not to be known of or suspected by almost every citizen in the town. Clement Marot's psalms were continually sung, sometimes in devotion, sometimes in defiance; images were broken or defaced, scurrilous inscriptions posted on walls, dogs sent about the streets with rosaries tied round their necks, and a variety of other ways found of setting public authority at nought, and ridiculing the established religion. Michel was again the cause of mourning. One day he was missing and not to be found. Marcelline, of course, was

unable to seek him ; Mère Suzanne adopted the notion he must have strayed into some neighbour's house, and fruitlessly inquired for him. Colette thought he must have gone towards the cathedral, and was hastening thither, when some strong impulse led her to return and look over the parapet.

Far down below, dashed on a ledge of almost inaccessible rock, lay poor Michel. Her screams brought others to her assistance : one ran for Christophe, another for a rope, the rest pitied and wondered.

When Colette first descried him, she caught a glimpse of a dark form, whether of man or beast, retreating from him ; but, when she looked again, she saw only the shattered, senseless form, and continued straining her eyes towards it till Christophe, accompanied by two or three men, came up, pale and panting. In perfect silence, he fastened a heavy weight to the rope, and dropped it down, to be assured it was long enough ; then hauled it up, secured it firmly round his waist, bade his companions hold fast and lower him gently, and commenced his perilous descent.

It made Colette giddy to look at him, and yet

she could not turn away. He was a pretty good mountaineer, and catching hold of a twig here, resting his foot on a ledge there, he managed to ease his descent very well, and was soon on the platform where Michel lay. Directly he reached it, Colette saw him start, and stand still for a moment, with his back to his brother; then he disappeared for an instant, and then was again in sight, fastening the rope round poor Michel's body.

Colette saw that something mysterious was going on, but had the presence of mind to keep her observations to herself: everything, compared with watching the ascent of her brothers, was of minor importance. She wept bitterly as Michel's dangling form, hardly more helpless than in life, was brought up to the parapet; she bestowed on it a weeping embrace, and then, as soon as the rope was removed to be lowered for Christophe, she resigned him to the tears and embraces of Mère Suzanne, while she watched for the safety of her living brother. The second ascent was far more important than the first, and attended with difficulty and danger. At length, however, it was safely effected, and she threw herself into Christophe's arms.

The kindness of poor people to one another is proverbial. Though no one out of the family could look on the death of Michel as anything but a release, the known affection of his relatives for him called forth the greatest sympathy among their neighbours, who condoled with them as if they had lost the prop of the house, instead of one who had always been a burden to it. Colette and Mère Suzanne were the two who felt it most: Colette had looked on him as a legacy from her mother, and had always been in the habit of reproaching herself bitterly if other duties caused her occasionally to remit her vigilant watch over him; Mère Suzanne bemoaned him as her precious boy, her innocent, helpless darling, and found her only consolation in laying him out, according to the rites of the church she had belonged to all her life, with tapers at his head and feet, holy water at his side, and a crucifix on his breast. The coming and going of many officious friends gratified rather than molested her, for her grief was sociable and garrulous: while Colette, with her apron to her eyes, sat on the ground beside Marcelline's couch, with Marcelline's feeble arm round her neck.

At nightfall, when all were left to themselves, Christophe arose from the chimney-corner and left the house.

"He is gone, doubtless, to bespeak a coffin, poor dear!" said Mère Suzanne, and, with a fresh burst of tears, she returned to her post beside Michel.

"Now that we are quite quiet and by ourselves, let us pray," said Marcelline. "You cannot? Then, I will pray for you."

"We must not pray for the dead," said Colette.

"No, but for the living. For you, for me, and all of us."

She prayed in a hushed, fervent voice, that carried healing to Colette's heart; and then they remained silent, or spoke at intervals, talking over little anecdotes of Michel, little traits of what they fondly thought intelligence.

"He certainly was far superior to most crêtins," said Colette. "He could use his hands and feet better, certainly had glimmerings of sense, could remember some people's faces who were kind to him; Bertrand's, for instance. Then, how fond he was of the cathedral! and, at night, even if I

could not get him to repeat the Pater-noster after me, he would almost always put up his hands. No one could justly call him greedy, though he was very fond of eating, but he cared very little what it was."

"For my part," said Marcelline, "I must still rejoice I extended his life ever so little, since it would have been much more painful to him to be burnt to death, than to pitch on his head and break his neck at once as he has done. But it seems you are doomed to have some one dependent on you; I am now nearly as helpless as he was."

"Aunt, do not name it," said Colette; "my greatest happiness is to wait on you, and I would gladly have devoted my whole life to you and to him. Do you know, I saw a very strange thing—"

At this moment the door was softly opened, and Christophe cautiously entered, followed by Bertrand, who looked as haggard and careworn as when he had presented himself to Magdeleine.

Marcelline uttered a low cry of surprise. He approached her, would have taken her hand, but seeing it bound up, desisted with a look of

pity, and then turned to Colette with tears in his eyes.

“Do not look on me,” said he, “as accessory to the death of your poor brother.”

“You?” cried Colette in dismay.

“You recognised me when you screamed, did you not?”

“No! Oh, what *can* you mean?”

“You know how I have been hunted down. Chance, or rather Providence, directed me to a cavern in the rock, which I discovered by climbing from below in search of some cleft where I might shelter. The access to it was very perilous, which made it all the more secure from my enemies, and there was a little water trickling from above, which sufficed to quench my thirst. Food, however, I had none; and I was ready to die of hunger till I stole into the town one night to glean news of my brother. I succeeded in seeing Mademoiselle de St. Nectaire’s maid, who introduced me to her mistress. She, with the mercy of an angel, interceded for me with the Bishop, and procured me a safe-conduct and admission to my brother for one hour. It was of the greatest importance and the greatest comfort

to both. I found the town was in such a state of fury against the reformers, that I should harm my cause rather than benefit it by re-appearing, and therefore I returned to my cave, carrying a couple of loaves with me. When these were consumed, I feared I must again venture into the town; but, to my surprise, I found pieces of bread lying about the mouth of my cave. It seemed as though God would remind me he was still the same Lord who had sent ravens with food for Elijah. Whence it came I knew not, but I ate it in thankfulness of heart. The supplies were irregular; one morning, as I was worshipping God at my cave-door, a piece of bread fell upon the rock before me. I looked up, and descried Michel."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Marcelline.

"All is now accounted for," said Colette, shedding tears. "Think of the innocent fellow having the art to save your life!"

"I cannot bear to think of it," said Bertrand, drawing his hand across his eyes, "because it led to his own death. Day by day, I fed on his bread and drank the water from the rock; I mused on Melan's fate till my brain was ready to

turn ; but at length I reconciled myself to it, and when the day of doom had passed, I was enabled to praise God that my brother had joined the noble army of martyrs. Thenceforth, great peace was accorded me ; I prayed much, mused much, resolved much, and read my Bible with delight. But my supplies, though they kept life in me, were, as you know, insufficient for the support of a man's strength. I was beginning to think of venturing into the town, when, this morning, a piece of bread fell down at the door of my cave, followed the next instant, to my grief and horror, by poor Michel himself. I hastened to him, but his neck had broken, and life was quite extinct. Thank God, his sufferings could have been but momentary. While I was composing his yet warm remains, and preparing to descend the rock and come to you at all hazards, I heard you scream. Can you forgive me ? ”

“ There is nothing to forgive,” said Colette, weeping ; “ you could not help the accident ; it is I, rather, who should blame myself for allowing him to be out of my sight. I always was afraid of that parapet.”

“ But what has occasioned *your* present suf-

fering?" said Bertrand, turning anxiously to Marcelline. "You appear to have sustained some terrible injury."

Marcelline averted her head, and said nothing.

"Ah," said Colette, renewing her tears, "she sacrificed herself for poor Michel. His bed was on fire, and she carried him from it and was fearfully burnt."

"*You* saved him, and *I* destroyed him!" cried Bertrand. "How different are our positions!"

"Come, you must remember now that you are a starving man," said Christophe; "I have set out the table as well as I can for you, and you must eat, drink, and renew your strength. After that you shall pray with us, talk with us, or what you will."





CHAPTER XVII.

A Wedding.

THE spring primroses had scarcely put forth their green leaves when the city of Le Puy was full of rejoicing at the marriage of Magdeleine de St. Nectaire. Young, beautiful, virtuous, early orphaned, charming in manner, soft in heart, she was the darling of rich and poor. Each party claimed her for its own; for, while she had shrunk from openly declaring herself one of the reformers, she had sheltered, cherished, and pleaded for them; and many attributed to her compassion what was in fact owing to her conscience.

Her nuptial festivities partook of the splendour and publicity of the olden time. Fifty young nobles and knights wore her colours, and vowed themselves her champions in whatever cause she undertook, in whatever danger she might find herself. Fifty beautiful and high-born damsels

clad in white, with scarfs and streamers of divers colours, appeared in her train as bridesmaids, and at night led the dance with the fifty cavaliers. How many noble matrons were their chaperons, how many reverend signiors, courtly seneschals, and warlike barons planted out the intervals, history deponeth not ; but doubtless there were representatives of every grade of rank and dignity, to aid in demolishing the enormous amount of good cheer, which for fourteen days was served up in the bishop's palace, from the lordly peacock and knightly boar, garnished—the one with his feathers, the other with his tusks—to the delicate *veau à la crème* and the dainty *blanc-mangers de Languedoc*.

Then, for the minstrelsy ! the sirventes, the serenades, the *lais*, the *chansonettes*, the *rondeaux*, made expressly for the occasion ! You might have imagined yourself at one of the old courts of love ! The huntings, the *tourneys*, the *ridings* at the ring, the *masques*, the theatrical representations ! Some of these latter, not having been previously inquired into sufficiently by the masters of the ceremonies, proved rather indigestible to the Bishop, and to others set in authority,

For instance, the curtain drawing up, discovered a venerable lady, no less a personage than Mother Church, very ill, and like to die, attended by various monks and friars, black, white, and grey, whose efforts in the healing art only resulted in making her groans and convulsions more terrible. Then came in succession abbots, cardinals, and at length the Pope himself, at sight of whom she fell into such fearful convulsions, that he shook his head and pronounced he had been sent for too late. However, as soon as his holiness had retired, she began to show signs of revival ; and a man in Geneva bands and skull-cap coming in with a Bible, which he placed in her hand, she suddenly recovered, and clasped it to her heart, saying that now she had found the true panacea, and should live and be happy for ever.

After this comedy there was a farce between a Father Francis and a Sister Catherine, which made several people laugh till they cried ; but the Bishop looked grave upon it ; and as soon as he retired for the night, he sent for the leader of the revels and desired that the censorship of the stage might be somewhat more rigorously exercised. A jest was a jest, but he could not have

any profanity or scurrility. So the hint was taken, and the evening's performance was "The Death of Phaëton," at which nobody either laughed or cried.

When Magdeleine took leave of her noble brother, whom she received without witnesses in her own closet, she thanked him, even with tears, for his affection and protection throughout her girlhood, and prayed that they might never become estranged from one another.

"But, brother," said she in conclusion, "for give me if I say you should not draw the rein too tightly—with regard to the poor reformers, I mean. See what came of burning Farel and De la Vigne. For one proselyte they instantly had a dozen : persecution only nourishes them ; they triumph in it, and it does your cause no good."

"I am partly of your mind, Magdeleine," replied he ; "and, as you know I am not of a bloodthirsty nature, I mean to try what moderate toleration will do. Cruelty is abhorrent to me ; and I even so weakly shrink from the execution of severe justice that, if it please God, we will have no more burnings in the market-place. But beware of letting compassion draw you out of the

straight path, my sister ! Beware of itching ears. Like most women, you have more fancy than reason, more feeling than judgment, and you too readily fall a prey to specious eloquence, backed by the appearance of heroism under misfortune. Farewell ; love God, whatever you do, but become the champion of no party, unless that of the Church."

After the bridal, the festivities were transferred, according to the manners and customs of the time, to the Château de Miremont ; where hunting, harping, singing of songs, and telling of tales enabled numerous guests to digest much feasting. Even when the bride and bridegroom were comparatively left to themselves, they were surrounded by a large retinue, and many of their friends and kindred were continually coming and going ; so that their hospitable hall continued to present much the same kind of scene as that of Branksome, when—

"Nine and twenty knights of fame
Hung their shields upon the wall,
Nine and twenty squires of name
Led their steeds from bower to stall."

Magdeleine had so long been accustomed to this style of living that she acquitted herself in

her new position with the utmost ease and grace : no wonder, therefore, that with the addition of so much beauty, sweetness, and sprightliness, she became the object of chivalrous adoration, and that she was sung by minstrels, and vaunted by cavaliers, throughout the length and breadth of France. But a reverse was in store.

One day, she was hunting in a forest, with a gay retinue, when the ardour of the chase led her, accompanied only by her husband, into a sylvan glade unknown to them both. An ill-fated Walter Tyrrel in their train let fly an arrow, which, glancing aside from the stag, pierced the poor young Seigneur de Miremont, who fell from his horse with a groan, and was dragged in his stirrups. The piercing cries of Magdeleine caused the unlucky man-slayer to ride off as fast as he could—not to seek for aid, but to escape detection ; but the next instant the bridle of Guy's horse was firmly seized by a tall, powerful man in the meridian of life, clad in the loose, russet gown and sandals of a hermit. He reassured Magdeleine with his voice, at the same time that he checked the fiery hunter, and disentangled Guy's foot from the stirrup. Magdeleine sprung

from her saddle, and had her arms about her husband the next instant ; but she was unable to raise him ; and the hermit, who seemed to have the strength of a giant, took him up in his arms, and carried him as a nurse might carry a good-sized child, along a little foot-track through the trees which led to his dwelling.

“ A little, lowly hermitage it was,
Down in a dale, hard by the forest's-side,
Far from resort of people that did pass .
In travel to and fro : a little wide
There was a holy chapel edified,
Wherein the hermit duly wont to say
His holy things each morn and eventide ;
Thereby a crystal stream did gently play,
Which from a sacred fountain welled forth alway.”

To his leafy pallet within this little hermitage, the anchorite, who was another sort of man from the villain Archimage, bore his hapless burden ; and having gently deposited him thereon, he fetched water from the crystal stream in a beachen bowl, and set Magdeleine to bedew his face with it, while he himself examined the wound. It proved to be mortal, nor did he think fit to extract the dart, as the life-blood would instantly well out ; but resigning Guy to his wife's charge with the utmost compassion, he hastened forth to see

if haply he might encounter some of the hunting party and obtain their assistance.

Poor Guy just opened his eyes to give one look of love to his wife, crossed his breast, and with a slight shiver expired. When the hermit returned with Claude, the page, and Etienne St. Arnaud, the Seigneur's squire, they found the unfortunate Magdeleine fallen across his body as insensible as himself.

Others of the train speedily came up; others had already ridden off to the Château for assistance; so that, in something less than an hour, a concourse of people arrived, bringing with them two litters, in one of which they placed the Seigneur de Miremont, and in the other Magdeleine.

Thus was the house of feasting speedily converted into the house of mourning; and Languedoc, which had lately rung with the bridal festivities of the young pair, was now rife with many variations of the sad catastrophe, and of the despair, the almost alienation of reason, of the unfortunate Magdeleine.

When her agony had somewhat spent itself, it gave place to a settled gloom. Every regulation

of her household partook of the character of her grief: instead of many guests, her doors were now closed against all but those who ministered to her sorrow or its alleviation; where minstrelsy had resounded, were now only heard psalms; tales of enchantment and witchcraft gave way to the study of the Bible, and lively entertainments to prayers.

For this turn of events Bertrand de la Vigne was greatly answerable. He had long before established a friendly footing in the household, and happened to be in the Château at the very time the accident happened. He improved the event, as old divines say, to the great edification of his hearers; and when Magdeleine, exhausted by grief, was ready to become the passive victim of despair, Melanie ventured to bring Bertrand to her; and his prayers and consolations afforded the only alleviation of which her breaking heart was susceptible.

Thus, while her doors were closed against the world without, Bertrand, without a single antagonist, was sowing the good seed within, watering it and watching it spring up into everlasting life. Magdeleine in her secret heart cherished a super-

stitious impression that the desire of her eyes had been taken from her because she had, for his sake, been a lukewarm adherent, if not an absolute deserter of the true light, to which she resolved henceforth to dedicate herself. Therefore, it came to pass, that when the Château was again opened to occasional visitors, its lady and the entire household were discovered to be avowed reformers ; and while some regarded her as a schismatic, others charitably concluded that grief had robbed her of her senses, and that she was no longer an accountable agent ; but, by all, her sorrows were held sacred.

Meantime, in Le Puy, the word of God mightily grew and prevailed. In gardens, in vineyards, in meadows, the reformed preachers assembled large and attentive auditories ; and these preachers, for the most part, were not regularly ordained and trained ministers from Geneva, though they were glad to get such among them ; but, in default of better, they were laymen from the middle and lower ranks, tradesmen, mechanics, artisans, many of them full of zeal and piety, but some of them terribly ignorant, and rather hot-headed.

The Bishop began to repent of his toleration. His ears were assailed, as he rode through the streets, by the lugubrious or vociferous sounds of Protestant psalmody within the houses; and he published an edict that no one was to sing the psalms of that sacrilegious apostate, Clement Marot, under pain of fine or imprisonment.

The very evening of the day on which this edict was published, the obnoxious strains were chanted more loudly than ever; and Fabien, among others, was carried before the magistrates, for transgressing within earshot of the Bishop's palace; but he paid the fine and was let off. Jacques Guitard was likewise brought up, but he protested that he had only been singing an old ballad in the mixed jargon of *langue d'oui* and *langue d'oc*—

“Peyrouna portava au marcha
Un toupi de lait sur sa tête;”

and that, not being a good musician, he had insensibly lapsed into one of the tunes that were continually being dinned into his ears, and which he thought very ugly. Prisoner's plea admitted.



CHAPTER XVIII.

The Routiers.

CHRISTOPHE now thought that, as the season was advancing, he might accompany Grégoire, who was going to look after his farm and little field, which he had already ploughed and sown.

Accordingly, the two neighbours set forth ; and as the trees and hedges were already clad in their full green, and the wheat and barley springing up in the fields nearest the town, they thought they had been somewhat tardy in looking after their crops.

Grégoire was one of the friendliest of men ; and as he had been on the best of terms with Christophe's father, Christophe always felt himself drawn towards him with uncommon respect and affection. Thus, when Grégoire beguiled the road by asking him various questions concerning

his winter's work, Christophe told him with perfect frankness how much he had made by it, and why he had made no more ; concluding by wishing, with a sigh, that he were a richer man. And when Grégoire asked him why he wished that, he said, with a little sheepishness, " Surely I need not tell you—that I might aspire to make myself acceptable to Gabrielle. Though, ten to one, she wouldn't have me after all."

" Tut, tut," said the good farmer, " why should not you, in that case, stand as good a chance as another man? Gabrielle is not harder to please than other girls, I think ; and, if you spoke first, I don't know that she might be unfavourable to you. For my part, I see no reason why you should not set up together this summer, when we have returned to our farms. Fabien has no mind to leave the city, I can see ; and I shall want somebody to help me, either for love or money. And you would do as well as any one else."

Christophe's heart seemed to leap into his mouth ; and though he knew that winning Gabrielle's good will was a very different thing from securing the approval of her father, yet a great barrier was removed, and he thanked Grégoire

most gratefully. Thereafter, they talked together like father and son, and discussed their plans for the summer, as if their interests were in common.

Grégoire, to reach his own home, had to pass that of Christophe. Instead of the substantial, moss-grown cottage in which the young man had been born, they found only a heap of charred and blackened ruins. The *routiers* had been there! Tears of indignation and sorrow started into Christophe's eyes.

"Cheer up, cheer up!" said Grégoire, laying his hand on his shoulder; "it was a good thing you were all in Le Puy when it happened. We'll make a frolic, and rebuild it in a few days; half of the wood-work is only smoked, not burnt; and I fancy you did not leave many valuables in it."

"Such as they were, we had no other. It was the roof under which we were all brought up. See, here is my mother's distaff!"

"Well, poor soul, it was a good thing the *routiers* did not pay their visit in her lifetime, for she would have been unable either to keep them out or run away. In former days, I believe, they

respected the poor and only pillaged the rich. As I live, they are stealing among the trees now ! Let us hide in the old chimney, or we may come to mischief. There we shall see and hear what they are about, ourselves unseen."

It appeared so decidedly a case in which discretion would be the better part of valour, that Christophe unhesitatingly adopted the good farmer's suggestion, and gave him a helping hand in the first place to scramble up into a little niche for curing bacon, a couple of yards or so up the ruinous chimney,—one of the stones in which being dislodged, afforded them a good loophole of observation.

A file of twenty or thirty men, without any order or attempt at concealment, came out of the wood, and along the road in front of the cottage. They were ill-dressed, and clownish in gait as well as in apparel, armed with scythes, pitchforks, and bludgeons. When they came in front of Christophe's cottage, one of them, in no wise superior in appearance to the rest, save that he wore an old pair of sabots, while most of the others were barefooted, cried "Halt !" which they did, after a disorderly fashion.

"Here's been some one before us," said the leader, pointing to the ruins, on which the others laughed.

"No great pickings," said one; "we shall find better spoil in Le Puy."

These men, being a mixed party,—natives of Auvergne, Languedoc, and other provinces,—spoke each his own dialect, with more or less of Spanish, Italian, and corrupt French in it, so as to be barely intelligible to his companions.

"Ay! Le Puy! Le Puy!" cried another, in a voice that had hardly anything human in it; "you said you'd lead us to Le Puy."

"I said I would lead you to Blacons," said the first.

"Who is Le Puy, and who is Blacons?" said another.

"Le Puy is a place, a city, you goose," said the first; "a city full of gold, of silver, of wine, and of brandy."

"Ah, ah! lead us to Le Puy!" cried several.

"A pretty figure we should make," cried the first. "Why, there are thousands of people in it! I am going to lead you to Blacons, who will attack it with thousands more."

“ Who is Blacons ? ”

“ Blacons is a brave captain, a knight of Malta, the lieutenant of the famous Des Adrets, who goes by the name of the Terrible Baron.”

“ Ah, we have all heard of the Terrible Baron. He’s the man for us.”

“ Well, the Baron is otherwise engaged just now, and has deputed the leading of some eight or ten thousand of you to Blacons, who will do just as well ; and he has hardly decided whether to attack Le Chaise Dieu, where there is a Benedictine abbey of immense wealth, or to proceed at once to Le Puy.”

“ Le Puy ! Le Puy ! ” cried many voices.

“ You know as little of the one place as you do of the other,” said the spokesman, with infinite contempt.

“ Are we going to Le Puy now ? ”

“ No ; at this moment it is directly behind your backs. We are going to Pont-en-Peyrat, where Blacons has bidden us all assemble, to form some idea of our numbers, and put us in some sort of order. We are all Huguenots ; you must bear in mind that we are all Huguenots.”

“ What are Huguenots ? ”

“ Fool ! Men who have a licence from heaven to rob churches and break images.”

“ Aha ! that will do. We will all be Huguenots !”

“ Now then, for Pont-en-Peyrat. March,—straight if you can ; but no great matter.”

“ Huguenots indeed !” repeated Grégoire, with disdain, as soon as the rabble had departed, “ pretty Huguenots ! ’Tis such as these that bring discredit on our cause ; and on any cause. The ‘ good Bishop,’ as they call him, of Le Puy, —and he is a good bishop,—lumps us up with this scum of the earth ; and no wonder he wants to put us down. Well, Christophe, I doubt if we shall have many crops to harvest this season. It strikes me we ought rather to get back to the town, and tell the consuls of this rendezvous at Pont-en-Peyrat.”

“ It is too late to do so to-night.”

“ Clearly. You and I must sleep in my farmhouse to-night, and start off betimes to-morrow. Stay ! I spy another detachment of these ragamuffins.”

The whole country seemed alive with them. Five several parties appeared and disappeared,

before the two men could quit their place of concealment. Some of these had iron-pointed hats, and cuirasses next their skin; others wore cam-burons, or quilted leathern jerkins. At length, under cover of approaching night, the two peasants prepared to steal forth; and Christophe, leaping down from his perch, helped his friend, who was a large, heavy man, to descend more carefully.

“I wonder,” said Grégoire abruptly, as they drew near his own dwelling, “whether I shall find the *routiers* have played me the same unhandsome trick they have played you. I shall not bear it quite so well, I fancy; my house was twice as big as yours, and won’t be built up in a frolic.”

Christophe had no flattering hopes to impart, and they proceeded in silence till they reached the old dwelling, the stone-built walls of which remained much as they had been left. But the door had been forced, and there was little more to be found within than without—bare walls.

Grégoire looked ruefully about him. “Well, here is plenty of firing,” said he, “so we can light a fire to warm ourselves; but the weather is not cold, we have no food that needs dressing, and

a gleam of light might bring the *routiers* upon us. So we'll e'en eat our bread and cheese in the dusk, and then lie down among the straw. I say, Christophe, you thought me better off than yourself just now; it seems we are much about equal."

When they returned to Le Puy the next day, they found the alarm had already been given. They met the Seigneur St. Juste a few miles out of the town, on his way to Blacons, charged with authority to avert the attack if it might be safely and honourably done, by paying down a handsome sum of money. St. Juste was brother to a man of tried probity—the Seneschal d'Allegre—and was well thought of by his townsmen, though known to favour the reformers; but in this respect he was considered the more likely to be acceptable to Blacons, who took the good name of a reformer on himself, though no one could have less religion, morality, or common humanity in his heart.

A little nearer the town, they met a man riding a small, sorry horse, which he was urging on with whip and spurs. On coming up he proved to be no other than Jacques Guitard, who looked as if

he were not particularly well pleased to see them.

“ Good morning, neighbour,” said Grégoire, stopping short, “ have you far to ride this morning ? ”

“ What is that to the purpose ? ” said Guitard. “ I suppose you know I have a little farm on the plain of La Condamine ; I am going to look after it.”

“ It is to be hoped the *routiers* have not looked after it already,” said Grégoire ; “ they have paid me and my companion that compliment.”

“ Are they out pretty strong ? ” said Guitard. “ Have you seen anything of them ? ”

“ Marry, have I,” said the farmer ; “ we counted five bands of them last night ; this morning the road is clear.”

“ Whither were they bound, think you ? ”

“ I heard some of them talk of joining Captain Blacons at Pont-en-Peyrat. They said he had some thousands under arms. I would not advise you to be out late.”

“ No fear of me,” said Guitard lightly ; “ you know they would respect me as a Huguenot. Besides, La Condamine is not Pont-en-Peyrat.

The muster has probably been exaggerated. Good day." And he rode on.

Within Le Puy, they found all in commotion. As it was possible that St. Juste's embassy might not be successful, the city was being put in a state of preparation for the impending assault. Every one who presented himself at the gates was jealously examined before he was admitted ; guards were posted on the walls and in the streets ; heavy old war-engines were being dragged forth and placed where it was thought they would be most useful or most needed ; men were rubbing up their old arms and examining their leathern jerkins ; armourers were having a busy time of it ; the sound of hammers ringing on anvils and the clang of old breast-plates and head-pieces were heard on every side ; men and boys were hurrying through the streets, carrying lances, halberts, and swords, arquebuses and fowling-pieces ; provisions were being collected and taken account of ; children, girls as well as boys, were carrying stones as large as they could bear, to pile in every window ; shop-porticos were being destroyed ; lanterns, to be kept burning all night, were being hung in front of every sixth house ; chains were being

fixed, to hang across the streets ; and trees that might afford the enemy cover were being felled. All was bustle, noise, and activity ; and Christophe, after a hasty visit to his sister, was soon as hard at work as any one ; while Grégoire went to report to the authorities what he had heard over-night.

Those who could help in no other way, filled the churches, and offered up their prayers. The Bishop was as active as any layman in the town ; seeing to everything, directing what was wanting, and despatching couriers to the neighbouring barons, to warn them of impending danger.

The weather was warm and close. In the evening, Colette supported Marcelline, who was gasping for air, to the parapet, where she had made her a kind of couch with chairs and pillows. They looked across the peaceful plain, watered by the Loire and gently-flowing Borne, and lighted up into inexpressible beauty by the setting sun.

“ See, there is a long train of people coming along that distant road,” said Colette. “ They appear to be advancing in some kind of order. Who can they be, I wonder ? ”

“Some poor, terrified peasants flying from the *routiers*, most likely,” said Marcelline. “How sad that such misrule should prevail in the land! And how shameful that these marauders should call themselves reformers!”

“They want reforming most of all,” said Colette. “Even Bertrand could make nothing of such ruffians as they are reported to be. I wonder where he is now?”

“At the Château de Miremont, most probably,” said Marcelline, with a stifled sigh. “The poor young lady doubtless needs counsel and consolation. But yet, poor people need them too.”

Victor came to his door at this moment, cleaning an old head-piece; and seeing Marcelline and Colette, he smiled and joined them.

“Are you, then, preparing to fight?” said Colette.

“Every man must do his best,” said Victor; “I have but little to fight for, yet I don’t want to lose that little; besides, every townsman must have some public feeling. I hope, with all my heart, the *routiers* will come, that we may give them a good thrashing. Young knights carry a glove of their fair ladies into the thick of the

fray; won't *you*, Colette, give me a scarf or ribbon, or some such thing?"

"One of the little feathers in my hat," said she, laughing, and going to fetch it for him. "There!" when she brought it back, "I don't know what my grandmother would say."

"This shall not be disgraced," said Victor, carefully fastening it into his cap. "And, Colette, if the worst should come to the worst, you know the way down to Bertrand's cave; Christophe and I would have made the steps rather easier if we could, but they are all the less likely to be observed; and you will find plenty of bread and cheese there, and water from the rock. Ah! here come the Capuchins to take refuge with us!"

"Can you make them out?" said Colette; "we were wondering who they were."

"Don't you see their cowed heads as they walk two and two, with the cross borne before them? They seem to bear a heavy coffer, which doubtless contains the chief of their treasures. I can almost fancy I hear them chanting."

"That *must* be fancy, Victor. See, another party is some way behind them, monks also."

“Probably the Dominicans. We shall make a holy war of it.”

“But see, see, Victor, those people hurrying across the plain by a by-road ! They come without any order, and much faster than the monks. Now they reach the Dominicans. They stop and parley.”

“This begins to be very exciting,” said Victor, leaning over the parapet. “Now they hurry forward again. Now they come up with the Capuchins. There are men, women, children, and infants in arms. They travel light, they have no treasure. Now they parley with the Capuchins ; now they pass on. Come, I shall just run down to the gates, and see who they are.”

“Victor means kindly,” said Marcelline, looking down the almost perpendicular face of the rock, “but I could no more attempt those steps of his than I could fly down like a bird.”

“No, aunt ; but Christophe and I have already talked about it, and we think we can lower you down to the cave without any danger and not much difficulty.”

“Plenty of fear, if no danger,” said Marcelline ruefully ; “I think I would rather remain

and take my chance. But," added she, after a moment's thought, "if I do not go, you will not go; my mother will not go. After all, if I *am* hurt, what will it signify? and most likely I shall not be. The Lord careth for his own. I will do just what you think best for me."

"Marcelline! Colette! what are you about?" cried Mère Suzanne, in her highest key, as she toiled up the alley, laden with various vegetables. "We must get into the cave to-night!"

"For pity's sake, no, mother," said Marcelline. "There is, as yet, no sign of an attack, and only think how little we have to lose!"

"At any rate, we can throw bedding and anything that will not break, down to the ledge," said Mère Suzanne, who having been considerably alarmed by the preparations and reports in the lower town, had returned in an absolute *furor* of activity.

Marcelline pleaded for the use of the bedding till some signal of danger should actually be made, and Mère Suzanne reluctantly contented herself with casting her load of onions, carrots, turnips, and beet-root over the parapet, and going

in-doors to pull every article of furniture out of its place into the middle of the room.

Victor did not return till after dark. He was accompanied by Bertrand. A tear stole down Marcelline's cheek when she saw the latter, but she strove for and obtained self-command.

"I thought," said she faintly to him, "that you were protecting the Lady Magdeleine."

"Protecting her?" repeated Bertrand, with a smile. "She would fare badly with no better protection than mine. Sixty of the bravest young chevaliers of Languedoc and Auvergne have pledged themselves to defend her against all comers. The Dame de Blaye, her aunt, is with her, the château is regularly fortified and provisioned, and many noble ladies and their children have taken refuge in it."

At this instant, the tocsin began to sound clamorously from every steeple and tower in Le Puy. Christophe ran in the next moment, and began to put on his camburon.

"What's the matter?" cried Mère Suzanne.

"Every man is called to arms," replied he, cheerfully. "The people of St. Paulien have come to seek shelter among us; Blacons took

their town and pillaged it yesterday. He purposes attacking us to-night or to-morrow."

"Said I not we had better get into the cave before the light failed?" cried Mère Suzanne.

"Dear mother, we had much better remain where we are," interposed Marcelline. "In flying from an uncertain danger, we may incur a certain one."

"It would be madness for you to attempt to descend the cliff in the dark," said Bertrand, "though I have just scaled it; but, with the earliest dawn, I should advise your taking refuge in the cave, which I have already observed is well provisioned. The *routiers*, if they take the city, will probably burn it, but they will not hold it long, and then you can return in safety."

Marcelline was thrilling like a wounded bird at the thought of the descent, but no word of opposition escaped her white lips. Bertrand, however, saw her terror.

"We shall take you down quite gently," said he, pressing her trembling hand, "and you cannot think what a snug cave it is. Evidently it has been the retreat of some pious recluse in

former times, for there is a little altar hewn out of the rock, and a cross is sculptured on the wall. It is of greater depth than I thought it worth while to penetrate, for the dripping water makes the deepest recesses of it damp; but the outer part is quite dry, and commands a splendid view all across the plain."

"What has a dying woman to do with splendid views?" said Marcelline, smiling, while a tear stood in her eye.

"A great deal, I think," said Bertrand cheerfully; "dying Christians have the most splendid view of all. And it need not make them indifferent to the splendid views of this lower world, which are but foreshadows, probably, of the glory and beauty of a better. Not that I admit you to be a dying woman, Marcelline."

"I feel it," said she softly, pressing her clasped hands tightly over her heart. He bent over her and spoke in a low voice, long and earnestly; and as he did so the look of distress gradually faded from her face, and gave way to the expression of unutterable composure and submission. She neither heard the clang of the tocsin nor the quick voices of her mother and

Christophe : nothing but those healing words—the words of Jesus !

Victor had meanwhile entered and hurriedly drawn Colette into the outer air, just under the threshold of the door. The night was intensely dark, but the lower town, lit up at every sixth house, was in bright illumination, and presented a good beacon to the enemy. The upper town, deserted by its men and many of its women, was hushed and still ; and the cool night air came refreshingly to it across the plain.

“ Colette,” said Victor, in an energetic whisper, “ many and many a time have I asked you in one way or other, since Christmas, to be mine for ever, and you have always put me off—sometimes, I feared, seriously, at other times in sport. But I do not think you quite hate me, after all ; and though a better and a richer fellow would only be your desert, there’s not a man alive could love you more truly. This very night, at the church of St. Laurent, couples are being married as fast as they can. Give me at once a husband’s right to protect you, and I shall be twice the man I am now.”

“ At once ! Oh no, Victor, I cannot ! To-

night, when there are so many other things to think of, such various and opposite duties for us both to fulfil, I cannot, cannot."

"What duty should we fulfil the worse for having but one interest between us? For my part, I feel as if I should do everything with twice the energy."

"Not with divided thoughts. At least *I* could not. Why, you speak of being married as if it were no more than eating one's dinner! It is a very serious thing, Victor, and one that requires a deal of thought."

"You have thought of it these four months, and not once to the purpose."

"And suppose the *routiers* should not come, after all! It would be all to no good."

"You foolish Colette! What good, except a good wedding-supper, would be missed? Why, I do believe you are hankering after the flesh-pots after all, and are thinking of all the savoury dishes your grandmother and my mother would concoct at their leisure!"

"Nonsense! I am not."

"Oh, yes; and you are thinking how much more you should like to be married in broad day-

light, not amid a lot of other people, but all by yourself alone, that the town might have leisure and opportunity to survey and admire you—”

“ Nonsense, Victor ! ”

“ In your bran-new silk petticoat and velvet jacket, and lace lappets of aunt Marcelline’s making ; and to hear people say—”

“ Nonsense, Victor ! I will not stay to hear you talk so ! ”

“ You *shall* stay. This time, I will be heard ; it may be my last opportunity. In a few hours, perhaps, my gory corpse—”

“ Victor, that way is worse than the other.”

“ Is it ? Then I’ll go back to the first. You are afraid lest, so many couples being married at the same time, we, being left to the last, should be the first to die.”

“ I don’t believe those old, superstitious stories.”

“ No ? Nor that carrying salt in our pockets would preserve us from the evil eye ? Assuredly, if I thought Fabien would be among the bystanders, I would empty the whole salt-box into mine. That’s the thing ! Fabien’s the fellow that stands between you and me, making mischief ! You like him better than me. Very well. If I

get hold of that chap's head in the next twenty-four hours, I'll pummel the life out of it ; and it will only be set down to the *routiers*."

" Victor ! Victor ! you get worse and worse every moment, Who cares for Fabien ? I do not, I give you my word ; I disliked him long before I ever saw you, and I think he has grown a very bad young man ever since he has consorted so much with Jacques Guitard. Do you know, he has actually wanted his sister to marry that man ! A man who did not think himself too young for my aunt Marcelline ! And Jacques would hardly take no for a negative, Gabrielle told me ; but declared to her that, if she would have him, she should dress as well as the Lady Magdeleine, and live in as grand a house !"

" Under *routier* law, doubtless. If they gain the town, I shall not be surprised at Guitard's making friends with them. He has always been false at heart. Well, Colette, since it seems Fabien is no real barrier between us, let you and I just run down to St. Laurent's."

" Certainly not. I am not quite sure, Victor, that I should like to be married by a benighted old priest."

“ Ay ? Why, then, here’s Bertrand, quite handy. He’ll tie us together as quick as thought ! ”

“ For shame ! If he were to hear you, I should be ready to sink. He never marries people. He is no ordained minister.”

“ Well, if you want one from Geneva, we must wait a little longer, certainly, but—”

“ Yes, Victor, we must wait a little longer ; and is not that enough ? Will you not be satisfied to wait, *only* a little longer ? ”

“ I suppose I must be,” said he, smiling ; “ especially as perhaps you would not have granted that much if I had not asked for more.”





CHAPTER XIX.

The Attack.

WITH the earliest grey dawn, Marcelline's descent into the cave was carefully effected by Bertrand and Christophe. The others joined her with less difficulty; and when Marcelline, still trembling and breathing fast with her excitement, reclined on the little mattress they had placed for her at the cave's mouth, and saw the gold-edged clouds announcing the sunrise, she could not help yielding to feelings of admiration and adoration.

At this moment, Christophe redescended the cliff, bringing Gabrielle, whom he led to Colette.

"Embrace your new sister," said he. "We have been married, and I have now only time to commit her to your care and hasten to my post. See! the *routiers* are already crossing the Borne, and will soon be within gunshot. We must not

wait to let them reach our gates, but man our outer defences. Farewell, dear ones all ! ”

And, hastily embracing his relatives and his new-made bride, the young man once more swung himself up the cliff, and joined his fellow townsmen with enthusiasm.

Bertrand remained for a time with the women, encouraging them, praying with them, and reassuring them by his mere presence. They all watched with intense interest the approach of the enemy, whose numbers did not appear to have been exaggerated ; and who made so directly for the best fords and the least circuitous routes, that it appeared extremely probable they had a spy or a traitor for their guide. In a few hours they pitched their camp on the plain of La Condamine, within gunshot of the ramparts. Some delay ensued before they commenced the attack of the town, which doubtless they had not expected to find in such a state of defence. At length, however, the heavy sound of cannon reverberated among the rocks, and wreaths of white smoke ascended the mountain-side and sometimes obscured the view of the valley from the fugitives in the cave.

It was impossible to watch such a scene without absorbing interest. The cannonade was presently succeeded by a closer fight ; the townsmen, animated by their chief, the Seigneur de Maubourg, being undeterred by the superior numbers of the assailants from rushing on them with impetuosity. At first their *morale* seemed likely to carry the day against numerical and brute force ; but at length, after advantages being gained by either party in turn with tantalizing frequency, the enemy came on like a flood, sweeping all before them ; drove the men of Le Puy into the fosses, and were about to rush into the town, when suddenly the great Pannessac gates were thrown open, and an unexpected cavalcade poured forth to the rescue.

At the head of this gallant band, consisting of churchmen and monks of every order, well-mounted, and armed to the teeth, rode Antoine, Bishop of Le Puy. He was accoutred in a suit of jet black armour, with a rich gold cross glittering on his breast ; his coat of arms was blazoned in silver on his azure mantle, and a scarlet plume nodded over his helmet. His only weapon was a huge club, which he carried on his shoulder,

for he shrank like a woman or a child from shedding blood ; but that club might have received and earned the name of Cæsar's sword—" *Yellow Death* "—for every routier on whose skull it fell, speedily sank the victim of the sallow king of terrors.

The apparition of this champion, so well supported by the stalwart, shaven warriors around him, was as successful as it was unlooked for. It turned the fortune of the day. The *routiers* were repelled with great loss, and the sun went down on their discomfiture ; while within the city all was exultation and festivity ; and the town bands, stationed on the ramparts, made the air resound with merry and insulting tunes, played on hautboys, clarions, and fifes, which sent rage and mortification into the hearts of their assailants.

Though the town was guarded all night, its defenders were divided into watches, so that each man might have a few hours for rest and refreshment.

Christophe and Victor, in high spirits, paid a visit to their friends in the cave, among whom Mère Génèvieve must be enumerated. As soon

as the first congratulations and thanksgivings were over—

“Gabrielle,” cried Christophe to his bride, “who do you think was the traitor who led the *routiers* across the fords? Your worthy friend and lover, Guitard!”

“Neither friend nor lover of mine,” said Gabrielle indignantly. “Just like what might have been expected of him! But oh, Christophe,” lowering her voice, “have you heard or seen anything of Fabien?”

“Nothing whatever: I fear he has joined Guitard.”

“Ah, I hope not!” and her tears began to fall. “And my father?”

“Safe at home, supping on *bouilli*. You know he said it would be as much as his life was worth to come down here, so it was no use pressing him; but I understand he has done a good day’s work at the guns, which he thought more in his way than accompanying us beyond the walls. How fine it was to see the Bishop ride forth, reining his mule as if it had been a war-charger! His blue eyes really seemed to flash from under his visor!”

“Do you know how the *sortie* was got up?” said Bertrand. “I, who have been in the town, can tell you. The monks were clustering about the cathedral altar, praying for protection, when a voice from the fane suddenly cried, ‘Let us go forth!’”

“Whose voice could that be?” said Victor.

“The Bishop’s, I should conclude,” said Bertrand; “there was nothing unsuitable in the words, whatever we may say of the way in which they were uttered. I have not yet thought of telling you a strange occurrence which befel me yesterday evening. Passing the mountain you call Denise, on my way from the Château de Miremont, I suddenly came upon a tall, powerful man, perhaps fifty years of age, with a dark beard flowing down to his breast, over the gown of a hermit. I said, ‘God save you.’ ‘Benedicite,’ he replied; ‘you appear to be a man of peace, like myself.’ ‘Aye, father,’ I answered, ‘but this is a time when men of peace are specially called on to be instant in prayer for those men of war who are about to fight on the right side.’ ‘How mean you?’ said he. ‘I mean,’ said I, ‘that some eight thousand *routiers* are about to attack

Le Puy, wherein are many fighting men, besides men of peace, women, and children.' 'And also, holy relics!' exclaimed he, crossing himself. 'Is it possible that these wretches can think of attacking the favoured city of Notre Dame, wherein is that miraculous image carved by the prophet Jeremiah, and inscribed by him with a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah? Surely an occasion like this demands that I, an old soldier of King Francis, should lay aside these weeds, and take my arquebus! It is not much, indeed, that a single arm can effect, but a single head may do more; and I should know more of strategies and surprisals, and means of assault and defence, than these peaceful citizens, even with their good Bishop at their head.' Then, taking from his bosom a ring with some symbols engraven on it, 'Carry this to the Bishop,' said he; 'it has previously been a token between us. Bid him, if he needs me, to send for me without fail.' I said, 'Your errand involves some peril to myself; however, though I am not going to fight for the city, I will risk my safety for it. We must each do what we can.' "

“ And did you take the ring to the Bishop ? ” cried Victor.

“ I did,” said Bertrand. “ He knew me well enough, but said nothing, except to thank me for my pains, and ask me if I would undertake to retrace my way to the hermit, if he found it expedient to send for him. I said I would. He bade me come to him at nine o’clock this night. The church clocks have already chimed the quarter, and I must go ; but let us first join in thanksgiving for the mercies of this day, and in prayer for protection to-morrow.”

When their short, fervent service was ended, Bertrand ascended the cliff and hastened to the Bishop’s palace. It presented a strange medley of warlike and peaceful appearances. Armed men and shorn monks were coming and going ; hot meats and generous wines were being freely partaken of by those whose strength had been much tried and must be repaired : the Bishop himself, who had given orders for Bertrand’s admission, was writing fast in his private study, beneath the light of a bright lamp, with a wine-cup untasted on the table, and a distinguished-looking man beside him.

“ Polignac’s inertia and St. Juste’s treachery place us at disadvantage,” said the Bishop, speaking while he wrote. “ This will do, I think—”

“ My lord, I am here,” said Bertrand.

“ I was pre-occupied, and unaware that you were present,” said the Bishop, looking up. “ I know something of men, and I know that you, with all your lamentable errors of doctrine, are integrity itself. Therefore I trust you to be my messenger to the hermit; and therefore it is a matter of indifference to me that you hear me read my letter to my friend. This is what I have said—

“ ‘ MONSIEUR LE BARON DE LATOUR ST. VIDAL,—

“ ‘ Be it known to you that the heretics, who have lately appeared in arms in several parts of our diocese, have within the last twelve hours attacked Le Puy, and are at this moment occupying the villages of St. Laurent, Espaly, and St. Marcel, with intention to renew their attack on us to-morrow. We have repelled them to-day, notwithstanding the inferiority of our numbers: nothing can exceed the ardour of our youth, which we find it difficult to repress. To-morrow

the field will probably be ours if you, M. le Baron de Latour St. Vidal, will make a diversion in our favour by rushing down upon them from your height with your disciplined men-at-arms. Every one knows your valour and ability ; no one more than myself. I therefore rely on your acceding to my proposal. With the aid of God and your good sword, we shall be strong. Fail not. We salute and bless you.

ANTOINE,

*Bishop of Le Puy, Governor and
Count of Le Velay.'*

“ That will do, I think ? ” said the Bishop.

“ Excellently well,” said the Seigneur de Maubourg. “ That is, it reads excellently well as a letter, though whether it rouses the old lion from his den remains to be proved. But, any way, ’tis a good letter, and I will see it despatched.”

And the Bishop having sealed it with his signet, and furthermore secured it with floss-silk, gave it into his hand.

“ Rather than yield it to the *routiers*, if they beset him,” said De Maubourg, with a grim smile, “ I’ll bid the knave swallow it.”

“The floss-silk may prove disagreeable to him,” said the Bishop. “Peace be with you.”

The Seigneur departed.

“Now, for thee, Bertrand,” said the Bishop. “Come forward to the light.”

Bertrand stepped forward till the light of the brilliant lamp shone full on him. The Bishop looked at him attentively for a few minutes without speaking.

“Thou art one of those,” at length said he, in a tone quite different from that in which he had lightly answered De Maubourg, “who have to answer for the perversion of one of the most precious of God’s creatures. Doubtless, thou didst esteem thou wast doing God service. I blame thee not; to thine own master thou standest or fallest, for I have promised as much to one who is dearer to me than life, as long as thou abstainest from public offence in my diocese; but, man, it would have been better for thee never to have been born than to endanger the salvation of Magdeleine de St. Nectaire.”

Bertrand was about to answer, gently and seriously, “I think so too, my lord,” but he felt

it better to be quite silent. The Bishop changed the subject.

“ To the matter in hand,” said he. “ You have undertaken to deliver my verbal message to the owner of this ring, that we shall be glad of his immediate presence and assistance.”

“ If he come not, my lord,” said Bertrand, “ it will be his own fault or my misfortune. I may be waylaid.”

“ By *your own party* ?”

“ Oh, my lord ! do us not the gross injustice to call them so !”

“ Well, I can distinguish. *Routiers* are not exactly of the material of Bertrand—”

“ And Melan de la Vigne ?”

“ True. Your unfortunate brother persisted in his heresy. You may yet be reclaimed. Farewell ; I have not yet tasted refreshment.”

“ You fought a good fight to-day, my lord.”

“ Well, I trust I did, with God’s blessing. Good night. Here is your pass.”

With morning light, the *routiers* were again seen swarming towards the town ; but they had only two field-pieces, and after changing their position several times, more to their own loss

than that of the town, they sent a flag of truce. When it had advanced sufficiently near the walls for its bearer to be recognised, he proved to be the traitor St. Juste ; and a cry of execration burst simultaneously from the lips of the townsmen. He himself, perceiving the Bishop, the Count, the Consuls, and all the first gentlemen of Le Puy on the ramparts, was abashed, and visibly changed colour from pale to deep red ; but still had the effrontery to persist in seeking a parley. Being repulsed, however, with the contempt he deserved, he set spurs to his horse ; and, shaking his fist towards his townsmen, made the best of his way back to his new comrades.

Shortly afterwards they appeared again in motion. This time their assault was directed against L'Aiguilhe ; and they were soon rushing up its steep, spiral path, to the great terror of the fugitives in the cave, who, being not only within range of their guns, but almost able to distinguish their faces, retreated into the inner recesses of their shelter, lest they themselves should be discerned.

It was while the *routiers* were thus engaged in sacking the church which crowns the rock, that

Bertrand took the opportunity of entering the city with the hermit, who immediately repaired to the Bishop and Count, was cordially welcomed by them, and thenceforth aided them most efficiently with his counsel and assistance. This remarkable man is spoken of in history. No other help had they; for the barons, caring only for their own selfish safety, continued inactive dwellers in their fastnesses, like the Edomites in the day of Israel's distress. Day closed without any advantage being gained by the assailants; and again the city bands played triumphant airs on the ramparts.

The third day, repeated assaults were made, and as frequent sallies from the town took place, each time to the discomfiture of the assailants, who, towards evening, gave up the enterprise and fled in scattered bands, leaving Blacons at length with a mere remnant of the Terrible Baron's men-at-arms to support him.

His rage was extreme; but to what purpose? His allies had dispersed to seek easier prey in lone convents, defenceless villages, and ill-garrisoned castles, carrying dismay wherever they went, and leaving desolation behind them. Blacons had no resource but to follow, as soon as

the shades of night veiled his ignominious retreat.

When morning dawned, and discovered the plain quite clear of enemies, the rejoicing in the city was extreme. It was not universal, however, for some were nursing the wounded, and others mourning the slain. Victor had received a hurt that sufficiently worked on Colette's feelings to make her consent to marry him as soon as he recovered, which he had, therefore, a double motive for doing as quickly as possible. Fabien was discovered slain, fighting on the *wrong side*, which embittered the grief of his father and sister. Marcelline was the greatest object of compassion. The exposure to the night air in the cave, her alarm at the vicinity of the *routiers*, whose random shot had occasionally penetrated it, and an unfortunate slip of Christophe's in taking her up the cliff, were too much for her enfeebled frame to support. It became evident to her awe-stricken nurses that her end was at hand. Often, during the course of that long, hot day, did her eyes slowly turn towards the door, as it became darkened by some shadow, which she thought might be that of Bertrand. As often did

she close them in disappointment, and think within herself, "He comes not; no, he comes not. He has been much to me, but I am nothing to him. This is always the way with earthly ties; they fail us when most wanted. I have no claim on him, none at all; and yet, somehow his presence would seem to give peace and safety. *Seem?* would that be all? Is there any rod, any staff, but one, that can comfort us in the dark valley? any arm that can as firmly as tenderly support us through it, but the arm of Jesus? Oh no, oh no! St. Paul's companions accompanied him down to the water's edge, but they could not enter with him into the ship. I, too, must cross this dark river alone; and yet I am not alone, for my FATHER is with me!"

Resolutely closing her eyes, she kept them closed, though not in sleep, staying herself on this thought. If she occasionally lost her consciousness, it was painlessly regained, and she *felt* that Colette was constantly beside her, though she did not look up at her. Colette sat perfectly still and mute, in heart-stricken, voiceless prayer, as she watched the grey shade stealing over Marcelline's countenance. The door and window

were open, to admit every breath of air, but the evening was so still that not a leaf stirred ; and the distant voices of the lower city, neither wafted towards nor from them, were softened into an indistinct hum.

All at once, the night air blew fresher and cooler—an exquisite relief to dying woman and nurse. Mère Suzanne was praying on her knees in a corner. A lamp was lighted, and placed behind Marcelline, not to molest her. Colette, watching her intently, and wishing she could be secure she was asleep, saw an inexpressibly soft smile steal over her features. Without opening her eyes, Marcelline said, in a low sweet voice, “ Do you know the force of fancy goes so far, that I could almost declare Bertrand stood beside me ! ”

“ He does—I do,” said Bertrand, gently taking her hand.

She looked up, gave him an affectionate, grateful look ; but with a startled, brighter look, suddenly turned her eyes to something beyond him ; gazed for a moment in ecstasy ; and, in that rapture, expired.

How the *routiers* again attacked the city, how

the hermit defended it, how the slothful St. Vidal at length did the Bishop good service, and how Magdeleine de St. Nectaire became the heroine of the Reformation—may be read in the chronicles of Le Puy.



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